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GO TO THE COUNTRY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

PIRATES' WHO'S WHO

SIR JOHN HAWKINS

HISTORY OF PIRACY

MEMOIRS OF A CAMP FOLLOWER

GO TO THE COUNTRY

BY
PHILIP GOSSE



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GO TO THE COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

It is a glorious May morning. The sun shines down from the blue sky above, where an unseen lark pours forth its joyous song. An elderly man seated on a bench on the cliff gazes with a vacant stare out over the vast deep-blue carpet of the unrippled sea, which spreads to the distant horizon. Presently an odd figure appears swinging along the grassy path. It is of a man past seventy years of age, dressed in a black broad-cloth tail-coat, black trousers, and wearing a wide-brimmed black hat. His appearance is distinctly clerical, although the wearer is not in Holy Orders. The hour is ten o'clock, the year 1884. The black-coated walker is my grandfather. He has risen early this morning, as is his wont; he has already corrected the proofs of an article for a zoological publication, has answered with meticulous care every letter which he received by the morning post, has said prayers and read a portion from the Bible to his assembled household, and has not neglected to deliver a short impromptu sermon as well. He has also found time to visit his garden and orchid houses, and is now starting out on a round of visits to certain of his self-assumed parishioners whom he thinks to be in need of spiritual aid. He is the embodiment of happy energy as he strides along humming the chorus of a Devon song. While still some way from the forlorn-looking man seated on the bench, he calls out in a resounding voice which might be heard by the fishermen on Oddicombe beach far below the cliff, "Good day, Mr. Chudleigh, and what are you doing with yourself

this glorious morning?" To which the other, a retired bank manager, some ten years my grandfather's junior, replies in a doleful voice, "Waiting for the end, Mr. Gosse—just waiting for the end."

My excuse for dragging in my grandfather is because the above incident gives me a hook upon which to hang a certain pet theory of mine. It has to do with that critical period in the life of a man when he retires, as it is called, from active professional or business life. This bald statement is likely to turn away in dismay many a possible or would-be reader; but I beg him or her to hear me out. If you are quite young, please do not shrug your shoulders and close this book saying, "What do I care about retirement?" for this important subject is one which you will have to face some day, and if you meet it prepared you will be entering what should and can be one of the happiest periods of your life; but if you neglect it, as so many people do, you may become one of that vast, forlorn army of people who, when they retire, sit "waiting for the end."

The very word "retirement" is a misnomer, for it suggests a man giving up the struggle; one who resigns himself to the inevitable, one "waiting," in fact, "for the end." There must be, I am sure, some better word than retirement to describe this important occasion in life, but so far I have not been able to find it, unless it be "emancipation." The ordinary dictionary defines the verb "to retire" as "to withdraw away, retreat, seek seclusion or shelter, away from contact with the world and from the society of others"; or, "to become a recluse, to be unsociable; to live a retired life"; but all of these definitions are unfair, for they express something exactly the opposite to the truth. That monumental work, "The Oxford English Dictionary," hits the nail on the head by defining retirement in the sense I mean in these words: "Retire; to give up one's business or occupation in

order to enjoy more leisure or freedom, especially after having made a competence or earned a pension," and goes on to give as examples "retired generals and grocers." Retirement in its right and proper sense is not retreat at all, but freedom—emancipation from the daily slavery of set employment and regular hours. Freedom to do exactly what you like, how you like, when and where you like. If instead of talking of a man retiring at the age of fifty it was said that at such an age he was going to be free, free to do all the things he had always wanted to do, it would be nearer the truth. This, it seems to me, is the correct way in which to look upon this important step in life. How often do we hear of a case where some man who has worked hard all his life at his business or profession, looking vaguely forward all the while to the day when he can leave his office or consulting-room, or be free from the routine of military or naval life, at last retires, when, scarcely has the great day arrived, or the first free feeling of a holiday begun to pass off, than he begins to wish he were back again at his work.

It has always seemed to me a very curious thing, and one much to be regretted, that while much trouble and thought are devoted to the guidance of the young into the right path of their future career, very little is directed to the vastly more important subject of how a man should retire from his business or profession. The latter, I maintain, is by far the more important of the two. A youth will generally make his own way, but the retiree is apt suddenly to cut himself adrift with no fixed intentions and no settled plans for the future, so that, like an old horse which is suddenly taken out of the shafts, he misses the support and falls down.

Nothing in the whole world is more irksome than having nothing to do. It is a well-known fact to doctors and life assurance companies that no sooner do a large proportion of

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active, busy, healthy men cease their employment than they rapidly deteriorate, physically, and still more mentally, and fade out. And why? Simply because they have allowed themselves to become so engrossed in their own lifelong occupation that when it comes to a sudden end they have nothing whatsoever left to fall back on to occupy their time and their minds. The south coast of England knows them well. They form the backbone of the golf clubs which guard our coasts from Kent to Dorset. The retired business men from the Midlands, the retired colonels, they sit in the card-rooms of our golf clubs "waiting for the end."

For the men retired from business there is such a wonderful opportunity for leading a happy, reasonable, dignified, and useful life, instead of dragging out the dull, disappointing emptiness of most retirements, or else deluding themselves with the hectic round of uprooted and unenjoyable enjoyment by which so many of them avoid contemplation of disappointment with themselves and the universe. There are stereotyped methods for sugaring the bitter pill of disappointment, such as motor-cars, dog and other racing, and golf. His mind must not be worried by his thoughts; something must be happening all the time to prevent him from becoming bored.

People are apt to go casually into retirement, without preparation or thought. Retirement should be an enlargement, not a narrowing, of life. Modern life demands more and more a concentration of the mind and faculties. The time has almost gone when any intellectual interests remain in the craft of making things, man having become a mere part of the great machine. All this slavery to the machine ends with emancipation or retirement. By the age of fifty most men have tucked away somewhere in the back of their minds a dream of something they would rather do than what they are doing. It is generally something quite differ-

ent from their usual occupation, and, once they are free, they will be able to devote themselves to it.

There seems to be an impression that after the age of sixty—bright young persons will say fifty—no man is good for anything else but golf and “waiting for the end.” That impression is entirely a wrong one. Did not the mother of Anthony Trollope write her first book at the age of fifty, and, once started on a literary career, keep on writing until the age of seventy-six, when she had become the author of one hundred and fourteen volumes? As her illustrious son observed, “Her career offers great encouragement to them who have not begun early in life but are still ambitious to do something before they depart thence.” Not that this exceptional example of delayed literary activity is to be expected of everybody over the age of fifty—Heaven forbid!—but it does give the lie to those who assert that after retirement there is nothing left for a man to do but play golf. There are many other examples of delayed or long-continued mental activity. Kant, the German philosopher, was seventy-four when he wrote his “Anthology,” “Metaphysics of Ethics,” and “Strife of the Faculties.” Verdi, the Italian composer, also was seventy-four when he produced his masterpiece *Otello*, to be followed six years later by *Falstaff*, while at the ripe age of eighty-five he gave the world his *Ave Maria*, *Stabat Mater*, and *Te Deum*. Cato, “the Censor,” was eighty years of age when he began the study of Greek, and it is recorded that Titian at the impressive age of ninety-eight painted his huge historic picture of the “Battle of Lepanto.” None of these was content to sit and “wait for the end.” But, it may well be answered, “We are not Titians, nor Catos, nor Verdis, nor Kants; what of us?” Very well, let us take the case of an ordinary man.

The late Mr. David Bryce was a good example of how a busy man should retire, although he made one great mistake

in putting off that occasion until the advanced age of seventy-four, which in the opinion of most judges was fourteen years too late. David Bryce was a Scotsman who, in the wake of millions of his fellow-countrymen, came south in search of a livelihood at the expense of the English. This migration took place in 1870, when he was eighteen years of age. He soon found a humble post as accountant to an important concern, the London Produce Company, and remained in their employ for fifty-six years, when he retired on a modest pension. Now many an Englishman at seventy-four would have been satisfied to "wait for the end," but not David Bryce, the Scotsman. All his life he had been interested in natural history, and had spent his Saturday and Sunday afternoons collecting butterflies and moths, beetles and flowers, and specimens of aquatic life, which he used to study in the evenings through a home-made microscope. He found time as well to teach himself enough French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian to keep himself in touch with the work of fellow-students of other nations. When at last freedom from the office stool came to him, he devoted his whole time to the close study of the rotifera—microscopic "wheel-animalcules"—which are found in pond water. Every day he entered the portals of the Natural History Museum, where he had enlisted in the army of unpaid volunteer workers of Cromwell Road. His work there was by no means that of the despised amateur, for before long David Bryce came to be recognized both in this country and abroad as one of the leading authorities on his chosen subject of the rotifera, and published a number of papers on them in the scientific journals, and also contributed the special article on Rotifera in the latest edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica." Thus David Bryce continued in his old age to lead a happy, useful, dignified life until he died at the age of eighty-five.

But the example of David Bryce is not held up as a

pattern to all retirers. There are several reasons for this. For one thing he retired twenty-four, or at the least fourteen years, too late. For another, it would not be at all to the liking of many a retired man, business-man or other, voluntarily to tie himself down to attending every morning at a museum to spend the whole day peering down a microscope closely examining the doings of certain minute aquatic organisms. The point about David Bryce is that he did not look upon the years which remained to him as years to waste, "waiting for the end," but occupied himself doing the thing which gave him the greatest pleasure.

The choice of a man's hobby is always of interest. How often it is one entirely the opposite to his regular or official occupation! The late Hon. Charles Rothschild, the banker, had for his other preoccupation the collecting and study of fleas; although it was not altogether surprising that a brother of the present Lord Rothschild should be a naturalist. Mr. Charles Rothschild, like Mr. Bryce, was no dilettante with his fleas, but before his death had become one of the greatest living authorities on that branch of entomology. His agents searched the whole habitable and uninhabitable globe for specimens of these wingless insects for his collection. A man I met in France during the War, who was in charge of a school of sniping at Mont-des-Cats, told me of an experience he once had with Mr. Rothschild. In civil life he was an animal and bird painter and professional collector of natural history specimens in the north-west of Canada. One day, while he was skinning a bear which he had shot, he saw and captured an enormous flea the size of a sixpenny piece. It was the largest flea he had ever seen, so he preserved it in spirits and dispatched it by registered post to Mr. Rothschild as he felt it must be a unique flea. In due course he received a warm letter of thanks from Mr. Rothschild stating that the bear's flea was indeed a treasure,

being unknown to science, and the writer enclosed a cheque for the sum of five shillings in payment. My friend from Canada told me that he never cashed that cheque with the famous signature on it, but had it framed to hang up as a memento on the wall of his log hut.

Another very strange combination of occupations is instanced in the late Mr. G. H. Verrall. If ever a man lived a double life he did. Besides being Clerk to the Course at Newmarket and official starter and handicapper to the Jockey Club, he was a leading authority on the subject of house-flies, or, in other words, a famous dipterist.

When at last a man has taken his courage in both hands and wisely withdrawn from the narrow to the wider life, he should already have made up his mind how and where he will spend the enjoyable years which lie before him. As to how he shall spend his leisure is a matter for him to decide for himself; it depends so entirely on his own tastes and interests. But there can scarcely be any question where he shall go to live, since it is in the country that he will find a whole host of new interests and problems all their own. His choice of where his home shall be, the size and kind of house he will live in, these again depend upon many things, and he must settle them for himself. But what is important is that he should establish the fact that it is possible to live happily in the country without necessarily becoming a recluse, that even if he lives in a small house in a small way he need not become dull nor get out of touch with what is going on in the greater outside world of art, music, and literature, nor lose sight of his old friends, nor fail to make new ones. Too many men—particularly, for some inexplicable reason, retired officers of the Royal Navy—become poultry breeders, live in small houses surrounded by chicken-runs and hen-roosts, and become altogether “poultry-minded” and go utterly to seed. Also for some reason or other it seems to be very difficult for a man or woman to take up the

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care and breeding of poultry or dogs without becoming almost impossible companions for any other than poultry and dog breeders. As I say, why this should be I cannot tell, but the fact remains. Almost as bad is the retiree who lives entirely for sport or for golf, or, for the matter of that, for any game.

I should like to have described in the third person what appears to me a reasonable country life for a man retired, to picture the life of an imaginary person living like myself in a country house. But it is difficult to do so without drifting into the first person singular. Therefore, though with some diffidence, I have ventured to describe a few sides of our life in Sussex in the hope that possibly some others may reap some benefit and perhaps a little entertainment from reading about it. Not that I imagine that ours is the ideal life for every country man or woman, but that, having found a way to be happy ourselves, others may be as happy also, at least those who are not devoted to the stereotyped round of social pleasures and occupations.

Of late there has been a positive spate of books about living in the country; the rustic life is all the rage. But this week-end rusticity is an artificial form of the "simple life" and has nothing whatever to do with normal country life. The authors of these books do not appear to appreciate the vast difference there is between owning a house in the country and a country house. Most of these week-end cottage books appear, at first glance, to be written by skilled gardeners; their hands may be ink-stained but they are "green-fingered." Since this book of mine makes some modest claim to describe certain aspects of modern country life, I suppose there ought to be at least a chapter or two about the garden and gardening. But, alas! I find myself in a difficulty, for although I love a garden and spend a large and happy part of every year passing from one flower-bed to another, and from one tree or flowering shrub to another, I

am no gardener, nor have I ever been able to learn and remember the names of more than a score or so of the flowers and plants which flourish in our garden. I am fully aware that this disgraceful failing would not be considered any sort of drawback to writing a learned chapter or two about gardening by some of the rustic-garden-path school of writers. I could, I feel sure, with the aid of a few nurserymen's catalogues, put together quite a plausible gardening chapter which only the expert would recognize to be a sham. But in any case why write more books about gardening when there are so many excellent ones already written? Of all enjoyments for the retired there is none more delightful in every way than gardening. However ignorant he may be to begin with, there are good hand-books on gardening to be read, which tell the novice exactly what to do, and when and how to do it, during each season of the year. If he has a dozen gardeners or just one jobbing gardener who comes in twice a week to do the heavy work of digging, there is always plenty for the owner himself to do in his garden. He is out of doors a large part of the day, the exercise is moderate, the life is healthy, and each day is full of constant interest. In any case, the best thing is to take over a garden which has not been looked after for a few years, or else to make a garden where no garden was before. It is far greater fun to make a new garden, or to remake an old one completely, than to take possession of a spick-and-span one which leaves nothing for the new-comer to do but add new plants and shrubs or make slight alterations.

At our first view of the garden at Crossbows our hearts sank in despair. A grey flint-walled farmhouse stood half hidden in a jungle of weeds, brambles covered the bushes and shrubs, purple clematis ran wild over everything. Bindweed, thistles, ground elder, chickweed, plantains, docks and dandelions and enchanter's nightshade, every

weed known to man, grew rampant in what was to be our garden. For weeds or no weeds, that first glance, we both knew, had settled our fate. At first there seemed to be nothing at all in the garden but weeds, but after poking about and peering here and there into the tangle we discovered Japanese irises which had spread everywhere, and one big yucca tree in flower. This was in August, but not until September did we get into the house, and at once got to work with clippers, bill-hooks, axes, and spades to attack the invading enemy. All that autumn and all through that winter we clipped and hacked, chopped and dug, until the garden was once more a garden and no longer a wilderness. The yucca we left until the end, but fine specimen though it undoubtedly was, we cut it down and dug it up. A yucca is all very well in the foreground of a photograph taken to entice the credulous to winter in the "Cornish Riviera," but it does not fit in with the surroundings of an old Sussex farmhouse.

Our most sensational discovery of all was made when we removed some debris and discovered several small ponds fed by a miniature brook. These were soon cleared out and planted with water-lilies, and flowering, scented, and other rushes. But it was not until the following spring, when the snowdrops, squills, grape-hyacinths, crocuses, and daffodils began to appear and then to flower, that we became garden-conscious and garden-proud.

It had been a long and wearisome business to find at last the sort of house and grounds we wanted. A London house-agent had been instructed to find us a small house in Sussex, one with about ten bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a not too large garden, but one that was well away from any main road. Armed with an order to view, we visited all sorts of houses recommended by our agent. One turned out to be an immense and imposing mansion with at least forty bedrooms. Another, in the neighbourhood of Good-

wood, which we drove sixty miles in pouring rain to inspect, had already been occupied for three months by a very irate colonel, who let us understand quite clearly that we were not by any means the first would-be tenants sent down to inspect his house by the agent. Then one August day when we had begun to despair of ever finding the right house, we saw an advertisement in *The Times* of one in Sussex which appeared from the description to be exactly what we wanted. To our surprise, for we did not then know as much about house-agents as we did later on, we found that the agents for this property were the very firm which was acting for us.

At the first sight of Crossbows we knew our fate was sealed and that we had hit at last upon the very country house we yearned after. It certainly was off the main road, and we had some difficulty to find it, but at last, after driving up a deep tree-shaded lane, we came in sight of "our house." It stood at the end of the lane at the very foot of Chanctonbury Hill, with the line of the South Downs running east and west, and had great oak woods screening it on the three other sides. So at last the fairy story was to come true. Always a lover of the country, although, or perhaps because, I was born and bred in London, I had lived and worked in London from the end of the War until I retired for good from the medical profession. But all the while there had been the longing for the day to come when I might give up the work I was doing and return to live in the country, as I had lived from the time I qualified as a doctor until the War broke out in 1914. When at last the opportunity came to retire I seized it with eagerness, and began once again to live the country life and do all the things I had wanted to do for the last ten years. It is with certain aspects of this post-War country life that this book is largely concerned, for the conditions of life in the country to-day are in very many ways completely changed from

those before the War. Some of these changes are for the worse, some for the better. Anyhow, I hope to show that for the average man or woman who retires, there is no question which place is the better to live in, the town or the country.

There are two points about which new-comers to the country should be warned. This applies only to those who have lived all their lives in cities and are retiring to live in the country for the first time. These two dangerous elements of country life are callers and village clubs. The former is a subject which needs very tender handling. One of the abominations of pre-War country life was the vogue of the formal call or visit. Not the first or official visit which could be returned and the matter then allowed to drop when it had become clear that no common ties or interests existed between the callers, but those bi- or tri-annual calls or round of calls, which led to nothing else but wasted afternoons. Mrs. A having called on Mrs. B in April, Mrs. B returned the call in May or June. Each paid her call hoping against hope to find the other was "not at home." Instead of letting the business end at once as now happens, the farce used to drag on year after year. Then there were those routine country-house dinner-parties where the neighbours were worked off in groups according to their position in the social scale—but let us draw a veil over those tedious orgies of smilax and port, and conversation about blood-sports and servant troubles. Half the joy of living quietly in the country can be spoiled if the newly arrived allow themselves to become involved in the local social life. Of course there are some who like to play bridge on a summer's afternoon, and like to pay calls and attend large dinner-parties; and there are others who do not.

The other danger which awaits the unwary new-comer is the village club. After you have been settled in your new home for a month or two you will receive one morning a

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letter from the honorary secretary informing you that at a meeting of the Cricket Club you were unanimously elected a vice-president. If you are innocent of the ways of village clubs this news will give you a glow of pleasure. You will hand the letter across the breakfast table to your wife exclaiming how very friendly it was of the Cricket Club to make you a vice-president. It may be true you have taken no interest whatever in the game since you left school years and years ago, but all the same it really was a friendly and neighbourly act on the part of the Cricket Club. You will write a letter of thanks to the honorary secretary accepting the honour paid you by the Club and enclose a cheque for one guinea. You have fallen into the snare set for you, but will not begin to suspect it until you receive similar letters from other honorary secretaries to invite you to become vice-president of the village Bowling Club, the Football Club, the Fat-stock Society, the Oddfellows, and the Road-walking Club; while your wife hears that she has become a vice-president of the Women's Institute, a Girl Guide, and a member of the committee which controls the public and private life of the District Nurse. Some organizations are more honest than others and ask straight out for your money; for the vicar's annual outing for the church choir to the seaside or a visit to the Zoo, or for prizes for the whist drives at the Women's Institute, or for the annual flower and vegetable show, or else for a subscription towards the ambulance, the Christmas waits, the village brass band, or the fire brigade. The last has the decency to send you a printed balance sheet, from studying which you will be able to gauge how small a sum you can give without appearing mean, for by this time you have begun to be alarmed at all these hungry bloodsuckers. Personally we do the handsome with the fire brigade, not because we have much hope of help from that quarter in case of a conflagration, but because in their balance sheet by far and away the

largest sum expended each year is that for the brigade's summer outing. There is something honest and open about this which wins the heart and loosens the purse-strings. The village brass band needs careful consideration. If you give them one shilling above what they expect you to give they will march up your drive one winter's night and serenade you.

The truth of the matter is that most village clubs and institutes are little else but gangs for extracting money. The members look upon the local gentry as milch cows from which hush-money can be wrung by lawful means of blackmail. Many of these clubs exist only on donations from vice-presidents, and it is only your money they want. They have been spoon-fed for so many years that they have lost all sense of shame in begging for contributions. There are, of course, exceptions. Some of the village clubs are beyond reproach. Our cricket club is one which is formed entirely of labouring men and boys who could not, out of their small wages, pay for the bats, pads, etc., which have to be bought or mended each year. A guinea or half-guinea from the vice-presidents makes this possible, and it is a pleasure to be able to help them.

A good method of dealing with the first rush of invitations to become a vice-president is to reply politely to each secretary saying how deeply you appreciate the honour but begging to be excused for this first year, as you would rather wait until you have settled in and are able to devote time to his particular club. Also you want to be very careful not to begin with too many guinea subscriptions, unless guineas mean little to you. Once you have given twenty-one shillings it is very difficult in future years to get down to the five shillings which you would like your annual subscription to be, and which you find out all too late would have been quite enough.

The question of the sort of country house he will choose

to live in is one entirely a matter for the retiree to decide for himself. It must depend upon his personal preference, on his income, and on the size of his family. But there is one point of such great importance, whatever the size of the house, as to be essential for happiness. This is the private room—call it library, study, sanctum, what you will—of the so-called “master of the house.” The importance of this particular room cannot be exaggerated, for not only will the peace and comfort of the man himself depend upon it, but the peace and comfort of all the members of his family as well. Nothing is more irritating in a house than an unoccupied man. He wanders from room to room, getting on the nerves of his wife and in the way of his children and his servants. Hitherto his work has kept him out of the house for most of the day, except Sundays, and the home-life has proceeded evenly and quietly. The wheels of the household machine have run smoothly, but the sudden advent of a man about the house is apt to cause disorganization. In other words, and to sum up the situation, a man must have a room all to himself, and this room must be quite away from the rest of the household. Never mind if it is only a garret under the roof so long as it is warm and comfortable and away from the sounds of the house, particularly of the telephone, the wireless, and the front-door bell. It must be out of bounds to all the household. The best room of all is one actually separate from the house itself. I myself am very fortunate in my room, and therefore my family are equally fortunate. When we took Crossbows we found a building close to the house across a yard which had once held a cider press. The basement consisted of two cellars, one now used for coal, the other as a larder. A flight of brick steps led up to a door which opened on to a dark narrow passage. On either side of this passage were several small rooms with walls made of varnished matchboarding, which I imagine had been bedrooms for men-

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servants, grooms, coachmen, etc. These I had removed, thereby making one large, long, rather low room, with a window looking south at one end and two long windows on the west wall. These walls I had painted with white enamel, and, as the central heating of the house did not extend to this outhouse, installed an anthracite stove, and later on an oil-stove to reinforce it whenever the weather became extremely cold. Here in this jolly room I can sit and read or write undisturbed. I get a fine view of Chancetonbury Ring from the south window and from the two other windows, across the kitchen garden and a tall hedge, a view of scattered oak woods and ponds, and rising hills beyond. This is the ideal room. All sorts of pictures and objects dear to myself, but which never would be permitted in the house, hang upon the walls. Family miniatures of dead and gone Gosses, original drawings and paintings by Max, one particularly delightful one of Mr. Kipling receiving the Nobel prize, with the late Sir Hall Caine looking on literally green with envy; while Meredith and Swinburne recline at ease on a cloud above, wearing carpet slippers, and superior expressions on their faces.

There are also pictures of Newfoundland painted by my grandfather a hundred years ago, and engravings by my great-grandfather, all objects which I value, but which are too personal and too sentimental in interest to hang up in the house. There are bookcases on every wall well stocked with books of every sort and with books of reference, encyclopædias, dictionaries, almanacs, atlases, a "Who's Who," the "Dictionary of National Biography," directories; all the books which you must have by you if you live in the country away from reference libraries or club smoking-rooms. Next door is a small room which is used as a carpenter's shop; where nest-boxes are made, to nail up to the trees, and small, very amateurish carpentry jobs are carried out, and where all our fishing rods and tackle and

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guns are kept. The big room is strictly "out of bounds," and no one may disturb me there except on the most urgent business. I strongly recommend all others who go to live in the country to do as I have done; they will never regret it, and neither will their wives and children.

CHAPTER II

No sooner were we settled in our new home than I became aware that there was something wanting to make it the perfect home. It was, I felt sure, in some way or other connected with the drawing-room, though for a while I could not make out what. Then all of a sudden the riddle was solved. The drawing-room is very large, the only large room in the house. It does not matter how small the rooms of a house are so long as there is one really spacious one for the family to live in. At one end of this room is a big open fireplace, where a log fire burns and smoulders from the first chilly days of autumn until the first warm days of summer. It was one evening while we were seated round this fireplace that the answer came to me. What the room lacked was crickets. A cricket chirping on the hearth is indispensable. There is a homely, friendly cordiality about crickets which is not easy to define. When the house is quiet, they will emerge from the holes and crannies round the hearth where they live, and begin their strident, but not harsh, love-songs. How far better it is to sit by your fire-side listening to the song of crickets than to the doleful and irritating outcry of the wireless. My wife, always sympathetic to all my suggestions, did not display her usual enthusiasm when I proposed we should introduce crickets to the house. She mumbled something about mess and noise. To this I had my answer ready. Mess, I was able to tell her, was what crickets lived upon; it was mess, dust, crumbs, and the like on which they thrived. Wherever there were plenty of crickets, I added, no broom, duster, or vacuum-cleaner was needed. The cricket was, in fact, a "labour-saving device." And as to noise, what could be

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sweeter, more soothing, or more homely than the glad chirrup of crickets? So it was agreed that crickets we should have, though we were not certain how to obtain them. As I had had previous experience with crickets, I was able to tell her how I procured some many years before. It was soon after I qualified and had started to practise my art and mystery as a village doctor in the New Forest.

I had not many patients and most of those I had belonged to families the head of which earned only thirteen or fourteen shillings a week, the average wage of a farm labourer before the War. I might have attended one of the children of such a family for several weeks; paid numerous visits and supplied quantities of medicine. Charging only the modest sum of half a crown for one visit and medicine the bill soon mounted up. How was a man with a wife and perhaps five children to pay a doctor's bill for thirty shillings?

I had just finished attending a long case of illness in the cottage of some nice but exceedingly poor foresters. They lived in a two-roomed mud-and-wattle cottage, with the usual open fireplace where a turf fire smouldered day and night. Round this there lived in the crevices of the walls innumerable crickets, which kept up an almost continual chirping song. Now these poor people owed me, at the very lowest, a pound, which I knew they would contrive somehow to pay and which would inflict real hardship on them all. So the next time I was round that way I called in on Mrs. Kitcher and struck a bargain. I told her that instead of paying me twenty shillings she could send me twenty healthy crickets. Mrs. Kitcher showed not the least surprise, but treated the matter as though it were quite an ordinary transaction between patient and doctor.

The following morning Mrs. Kitcher's little girl was sitting in my out-patient room holding a small cardboard

box on her lap. As soon as the other patients had been got rid of, we together opened the box in my study and liberated the crickets. She was a business-like little girl, for she made me count the crickets as they emerged, which was a difficult matter, as the moment the lid was raised they darted out in all directions. As she was so businesslike I felt bound to be the same, so when she left my house she took home with her one of my printed receipts, filled up as follows:

Received of Mrs. Tom Kitcher, for professional
attendance and medicine, Twenty Crickets.

With thanks,
PHILIP GOSSE.

This was not by any means the only case where my fees were paid in kind. I have been paid in firewood, turf, eggs, and other forms of primitive barter.

One confinement—the rock-bottom fee for these was one guinea—was paid in honey, taken out of straw skips, and lovely deep brown heather honey it was.

Had I ever sold my practice—as a matter of fact it faded away in the War—what a puzzling time the assessors would have had valuing my takings, as all these payments in kind were duly entered in the cash receipt book.

But to return to the crickets for Crossbows. To procure a supply of these insects did not prove as easy as I expected. Inquiries were made at one or two cottages near by, but the owners assured us, rather coldly, that they had no crickets. What were we to do? It was then that the idea occurred to us to advertise for some. After studying the advertisement columns of several newspapers, we decided to send an advertisement to *The Times*. But a difficulty at once arose. Under which heading should our “want” be inserted? Should it be under “Kennel, Farm, and Aviary,” or under

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"Christmas Gifts," or would "Business Offers" be the proper one?

Eventually we decided it ought to go under the heading "Musical Instruments." In the end we took the advice of the expert at *The Times* office, and the following advertisement appeared in the "Personal Column":

Live House Crickets wanted for Country House:
must be healthy, strong, and loud chirpers; state
price. Write Box Q.1348.

The response to our little advertisement was immediate and surprising. Strangers kept writing to ask why we wanted crickets, and a reporter interviewed the cricket expert at the South Kensington Natural History Museum about it. Many newspapers had paragraphs about it, and one of the illustrated dailies had a comic picture of a house-agent showing a prospective purchaser over an old house and the customer asking if crickets could be guaranteed. It was embarrassing to find so much publicity follow so simple a request. We felt as a public speaker must when some serious remark is met with unexpected laughter. Then more letters began to arrive. Letters from bakers to say that they had thousands of crickets which we might have for nothing if we would come and catch them. Cautious letters from writers who were not quite sure the whole thing was not a hoax. Several of the letters gave advice on how to rid a house of crickets, which did not help us at all. And some people wrote us angry letters, though why they were angry was not made clear. The *Observer* published a beautifully written article over the initials I. B. full of lyrical praise of crickets and apt classical quotations about crickets.

Everything, in fact, came to us from the advertisement except crickets. One letter marked "confidential" was

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from a lady in Worcestershire who said that she was a widow, aged 32, considered to be more than passably good-looking. She suggested—but a woman's confidence must and shall be respected.

After we had begun to give up all hope, a small brown paper parcel arrived one morning by post which, when unwrapped, disclosed a tin box with holes for air in the lid. Very gingerly we lifted the lid and peeped inside. There they were at last, crickets—all alive and kicking. Who sent them we never knew, but take this opportunity to return our grateful thanks.

When after years of toilsome study and numberless encounters with examiners I at last passed the "finals" and became a fully qualified doctor, the longing to live in the country had far outweighed any hankering after renown or the comparative wealth which is only to be won by doctors who practise in cities, and I set myself up in practice in a small but lovely village on the borders of the New Forest. The house my father built for me stood on the banks of a tidal river which wound its way through oak woods to the Solent. The life there was a very pleasant though a lazy one for a young man, for not having bought a ready-made practice, nor gone into partnership with a doctor already established, naturally my patients at first were few and far between.

To the layman the trials of a young doctor starting in practice are but little understood or appreciated. He is confronted by many knotty points about which his late teachers have said nothing. It has always been a disputed point amongst doctors whether it is wise or otherwise for a young practitioner setting up in the country to enter into the village life or to keep well out of it all. There is a good deal to be said for and against both schools of thought. Personally, I went all out for the social life, not from any

love of that sort of thing, but purely with the mercenary object of gaining new patients. I joined the cricket club, the miniature rifle club, and became a member of the Ancient Order of Buffaloes and of the rival Free Foresters; with both of which I took part in tedious meals of warm roast beef and damp boiled cabbage during hot summer afternoons. But by far the most exclusive, and therefore to me most important, coterie of the lot was the new village fire-brigade, to which I was elected honorary surgeon. The president and principal subscriber was no other than the lord of the manor, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. Mr. Dwiggins, the village grocer, was the captain, and a very influential man indeed.

When the brigade was formed and a fire-engine had been purchased, suitable quarters were generously offered by Mr. Peacock, the host of the Montagu Arms. These consisted of a large barn or shed opening on to the inn yard. There the firemen practised on three evenings a week and very soon became such dabs at darts as to be able to meet in contest and defeat most of the neighbouring village teams. The host of the "Arms" was no loser by his munificence, for he had no better customers than the members of the fire-brigade.

Conflagrations were not frequent at Beaulieu and only two broke out during my residence in the village. The first, by great good fortune, was reported at about one o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, so that the breathless messenger found the entire brigade assembled in the first place he called at, the tap-room of the Montagu Arms, where they were wont to gather after work. In a moment all was excitement and hurry; the engine was run out, while the wives or children brought the fire-fighters their brass helmets, tunics, and axes. A little delay was unavoidable because no one had remembered to get the horses, but this omission was rectified in due time. At last, the horses were

harnessed up, the men in their places looking very business-like and brave in their brass helmets and blue tunics with shining buttons, and the fire-engine drew out of the yard amid the cheers of the assembled crowd. Nothing could have been smarter or more workmanlike. As the fire was at the stables of the president himself, this was all the more gratifying.

After galloping out of the village, they slowed down when out of sight round the corner, reserving the horses for the final and spectacular dash up the long straight drive to the Big House.

Entering the lodge gates at a trot, the horses were whipped up to a gallop. As the engine drew in sight of the house there were to be seen Lord and Lady Montagu, standing with their week-end guests from London. Close by were the stables with thick smoke pouring out of the windows and oozing between the slates of the roof. The fire-engine drew up sharply, and the men leaped quickly down and each ran to his appointed post. Nothing could have been better done. Water from the main was close at hand. Lord and Lady Montagu and the house party gathered at a safe distance, to watch.

But why this delay? Why did not the fire-fighters begin? Hurried and anxious whispering was going on among the men of the brigade. Something had happened! Had someone blundered? Yes, the fire hose had been forgotten!

It was a subdued and crestfallen fire-brigade that returned at walking pace to the village.

The next call did not come till a year or more later. Although no one was to blame, it was not really a complete success; that is to say, not so complete as one would have wished.

To begin with, the call came at a most inconvenient time, in the middle of one summer afternoon when everybody

was out haymaking. Owing to this it was more than an hour before all the team could be collected. The horses were quickly on the spot, but the horse-collars were missing and could not be found anywhere. Search was made high and low until suddenly Joe Renyard remembered that he had left them to be repaired a few weeks before with Mr. Snell, the village saddler. However, all's well that ends well, the collars were sent for, and it was ascertained for certain that the hose was on board, when one of Jim Kitcher's children came running up to say that his father had mislaid his tin hat. Some were for going without him, others for taking Jim without his helmet, but the majority agreed with the captain in maintaining it would be unfair to go without Jim and that Jim must have his helmet. A good deal of argument went on over this point, which was brought to a close by the arrival of Jim's helmet, which had been found beneath his bed, hidden from sight behind some china.

All this had delayed the start, and it was a good two hours after the first alarm that the fire-engine dashed off. It was a long pull to the scene of the fire, a country gentleman's house. On arrival there, some surprise was felt at the lack of excitement or evidence of the fire. All was quiet, nobody to be seen, no flames, no smoke even.

The captain jumped down smartly and rang the front-door bell. In due time a maid opened the front door and inquired what he wanted. The captain hurriedly explained that he had brought the fire-brigade to extinguish the fire. "Oh, that," said the maid, "why, cook put it out an hour ago!"

They are anxious days for a new doctor who has "squatted"; that is to say, one who has put up his "plate" but has not bought a practice nor gone into partnership with a doctor already established. When I started at Beaulieu I had no experience whatever of private practice;

I had not even been a *locum tenens* to give me experience. Directly after qualifying as a doctor I became house surgeon at a small provincial hospital, and from there went straight into practice as a country doctor. There was no other doctor in the place, which was a happy hunting-ground for some half-dozen other practitioners from different villages and towns five or six miles away.

For some while no patients came, except one or two misguided persons, no doubt crazed by pain, who called on me to have their teeth extracted. Then one day, while I happened to be building an aviary in my garden, the maid came to tell me a child had called to ask that I should go at once to see Mrs. Dwiggins.

Mrs. Dwiggins was the wife of the captain of the fire-brigade who was also a sidesman in the church, and altogether the most important man in the village. At his shop was sold bacon, boots, blotting-paper, ready-made clothes, groceries, various agricultural instruments, sweets in big stoppered bottles—in fact, almost everything the local inhabitants could want.

Dwiggins's shop was also the centre for local gossip, news, and general scandal. I knew my opportunity was come, for it lay in the power of Mr. or Mrs. Dwiggins to make or break the reputation of a new doctor. My maid, a dull girl and new to service in a doctor's house, had most stupidly let the child messenger go without trying to ascertain what sort of illness Mrs. Dwiggins was suffering from, so that I arrived at the house with nothing to help me in my diagnosis.

On entering the best parlour I found a large, pink, full-bodied woman sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, surrounded by her family and more intimate female friends, who were not going to miss such a treat. After an examination, mostly oral, and the application of my stethoscope to one coyly exposed square inch of Mrs. Dwiggins's chest wall, I

retired, leaving instructions that the medicine should be called for in an hour's time.

Hurrying home to my new and well-supplied dispensary, I got to work. Various authorities were consulted, many prescriptions looked up; but my mind kept harking back to an old favourite, Pulv. Glycyrrhizæ Co., better known as liquorice powder. Why this was I do not know, but the fact remains. The liquorice powder I had in stock was not the ordinary kind but made according to the Prussian pharmacopœia; again I don't know why, but it was before the War. Now I knew better than to give Mrs. Dwiggins plain liquorice powder, because I happened to know she sold it over the counter of her shop and might recognize it; so I decided to make a mixture.

Into an eight-ounce bottle I put, after carefully weighing it in my nice new scales, a full dose of the Prussian powder. Then I thought I would disguise it with one of the flavouring essences of which the druggist's traveller had persuaded me to lay in a large stock. So into the bottle went a generous helping of syrup of orange blossom. Wishing my medicine to be particularly nice and sweet, I next added an ounce or two of glycerine and filled up the bottle with water from the tap.

By the time the label had been written and the bottle corked and wrapped in paper and sealed with red sealing-wax, the hour had gone and the child arrived for the medicine and took it away.

Next morning, just as I was wondering if I was expected to call again on my patient, and if I did whether they would think I was overdoing it, the same child came running to the house and said breathlessly, "Please will the doctor come at once to Mrs. Dwiggins?" I will confess that I went cold all over.

Had I missed a strangulated hernia, an acute appendix, or pneumonia? Why had I not had the moral courage to

clear the room of superfluous onlookers and insist on a thorough examination of the patient in bed?

On arriving at the house I was ushered into the same parlour, and one glance was enough to tell me something was wrong. Not only was there a feeling of hostility amongst the bystanders, but there was something odd about the walls and ceiling.

Mr. Dwiggins then cleared his throat and said, "Doctor, will you please explain the meaning of that?" and pointed to the ceiling. I looked up and there, and on the walls, were numerous brown splashes.

I made no reply, for I did not know what the stains meant.

Mr. Dwiggins soon enlightened me. It seemed that half an hour previously, while serving a customer with a pair of boot-laces, he heard a loud noise in the parlour. Leaving his customer alone in the shop, he had rushed in to find Mrs. Dwiggins in a faint and the ceilings and walls covered with brown splashes.

My bottle of medicine had blown up!

And there I stood, with the Dwiggins family and friends all round, waiting for my explanation.

The position for me was far from pleasant. I had not an earthly idea why my bottle of medicine had burst. I had never before heard of such a thing happening, and certainly our lecturer at the hospital had never told us that bottles of medicine could burst. If he had, his lectures on *materia medica* would have been better attended and more closely followed. Yet something had to be done about it, and done soon. That I knew only too well.

But whatever was I to say? I recognized, too, that I was face to face with that one great moment that comes in the lives of each one of us when a decision, a word even, may make or break a career.

Then the old instinct of the much-harrowed-by-

examiners came back to me; that longing to postpone making an answer to a question, in the fond but usually barren hope that the right answer will be vouchsafed.

At last, with the sole object of gaining time, I broke the awful silence by asking the stupid question, "Where was the bottle when it happened?"

"Standing on the mantelpiece," replied Mr. Dwiggins, as much as to say, "Where else should a bottle of medicine stand?"

A pause; and I saw light, escape, honour.

"What!" I asked, "do you mean to tell me that you placed a bottle of medicine on that mantelpiece with that great fire burning? No wonder it burst."

I was saved! Mr. Dwiggins turned upon Mrs. Dwiggins and upbraided her for being so stupid as to place a bottle of medicine near the fire, and reminded her how often he had warned her against that very thing.

As Mr. Dwiggins saw me off from the house he said he hoped I would call again next day, and added, "I'm a believer in good strong medicines myself, doctor."

When I got home I made exhaustive inquiries in the books on the subject, and apparently Pulv. Glycyrrhizæ Co. when mixed with glycerine and brought to a certain temperature is apt to make an explosive mixture in a closed bottle.

I have already commented on the difficult question of fees. Having had no previous experience to guide me, and being afraid to overcharge, I usually asked far too little for my professional services.

When I started to practise there was no State Insurance, and therefore no panel. Each doctor was left to make his own bargain with the secretaries of the local clubs. Perhaps I was exaggerating when I speak of making a bargain. It was rather a case of take it or leave it.

The clubs paid six shillings a head per year for all

members, which sum was to cover the cost of all visits, medicine, and treatment. The only thing to be said in favour of this arrangement was the entire absence of all book-keeping; no reports had to be written and no tiresome committee asked questions.

Most doctors took the clubs for the sake of getting as patients the families of the club members.

When the first news of the suggested Insurance Act with its medical benefits and panel of doctors reached us, it was received with unanimous and strong disapproval. All the doctors in practice in the New Forest met together and passed resolutions refusing ever to accept the degrading terms offered by the Government. Our dignity as medical men would be outraged, and we declared with one voice we would stand together, shoulder to shoulder, like soldiers, and starve rather than consent to such ignominy.

Message after message reached us from the British Medical Association urging us to stand firm, and to remember they were behind us, and if we kept a united front we should win the great fight.

Then rumours began to spread that outside doctors were going to be sent by the Government to take on the new medical services at places where the local doctors refused to go on the panel.

Then one evening a doctor telephoned to me to say that he had it on the very best authority that Mr. Lloyd George had sent a Scotch doctor to Lymington who had arrived there that very day in an omnibus with drawn blinds. The rumour of the imported Scotch doctor broke us, and there was an ignominious last-hour rush to get our names upon the panel before it closed.

As a matter of fact, the panel proved a blessing for all concerned, both patient and doctor.

The capitation fee was much higher than that paid by the old clubs, and in districts like mine, which entailed long

journeys by road, the doctor was paid at a considerably higher rate. The only drawback to it was that records had to be kept, giving the name, age, sex, and address of every patient, with the number of visits paid and the medicine supplied to each.

Most of us took no notice of this rule, and yet received our cheques with gratifying punctuality at the end of the first quarter. But at the following quarter no cheque arrived, and in reply to my expostulation to head-quarters, I was informed that I should get no money until I sent my completed records for the preceding six months' work. As I had kept none and wanted the cheque very badly, there was nothing else to do but make some out.

So after dinner that night I got down to it, and filled in a vast number of sheets with the names of every panel patient I thought I could remember to have treated, with suitable crosses or lines to indicate domiciliary calls or visits to my surgery. When I had made out what seemed to me enough of these to meet the requirements, I posted them off, and received my cheque by return.

But the matter did not end there. Not long afterwards a letter of thanks reached me from the local secretary to say that he had been instructed to write and inform me that at head-quarters my meticulous and conscientious care of my insured patients was much appreciated, and that they hoped the example I had set would be followed by the other doctors in my area.

It seemed that, according to the statistics, I had visited my patients at a rate of 300 per cent. higher than any of my colleagues.

This would not have mattered very much if unfortunately the secretary had not held me up to the other doctors as a paragon and urged them to follow my example, which in no way increased my popularity—as a new-comer—with my fellow practitioners. After this I fell into line and

gradually brought down my number of visits to coincide with the rest.

The life of a country doctor has its advantages and its disadvantages. For a man who has no ambitions to rise to giddy heights in his profession, but who is content to earn a modest, if steady, income, the village is the place, particularly so if he loves the country life, gardens, flowers, and birds, and all the other pleasures which are denied his more ambitious and far more harassed brother of the city. But even the village doctor never knows what each new day has in store for him.

It happened on one perfect June morning. After breakfast while strolling round the garden, I found a whitethroat's nest in a gooseberry bush, and in its frail cup of grass stems lay one mottled egg.

It was while admiring this that I was called to the telephone in the surgery. A man's voice, the respectful, modulated voice of a butler, requested me to call that morning on Mrs. — at the Big House. The whitethroat had brought me good luck, for funds were low and all visitors to the Big House were charged and paid a guinea fee.

These summer migrants, human summer migrants, were a useful if unreliable source of income to me. They supplied the jam to go with the local bread. The moment they arrived in the country they did extraordinary things which undermined their health. Middle-aged and even elderly fathers of families, accustomed to regular lives, regular hours for meals and office, seemed, when on holiday, to lose all sense of prudence. I have known one of these to arise at dawn on his first morning at Beaulieu and to go forth barefoot into the dew-drenched meadows in search of mushrooms. From his bed this individual confided to me that he did not think the air of Beaulieu suited him; it was too damp and relaxing.

The Big House belonged to Lord Montagu, and stood

high up in a wood, surrounded by oaks, pines, and silver birches. Each year as soon as the swallows and the rich Americans reached our shores—in those piping days of plenty, before the War, there were rich Americans—his lordship would let his house in the woods and move with his family into a smaller house he had built on the seashore.

But this summer the Americans were forestalled or outbid by a wealthy whisky magnate, and it was his wife whom I set off to visit on that never-to-be-forgotten June morning.

One put on one's best suit of clothes for a guinea patient, and wearing mine I duly arrived at the Big House and was ushered into the best bedroom. One glance at the mantelpiece prepared me for what was in store, for there, row upon row, stood medicine bottles, jars, pill boxes, and all the other paraphernalia so dear to the hypochondriac. And such the lady sitting up in the bed proved to be. She lost no time telling me her sorry tale. How Doctor So-and-so had said this while Doctor Someone-else had told her the exact opposite. Of course she did not have much faith in doctors, and perhaps—who knows?—she was justified. A typical *malade imaginaire* with nothing to do, great wealth, her whole interests had become centred on herself and her health. She wondered if I had much experience in such a case as hers, for she had her doubts, owing to my youthful appearance. To reassure her I protested I was much older than I looked, and endeavoured to hint that I had been successful in several cases somewhat similar, though not quite identical, to hers.

And the dreary recitation of symptoms began, and continued, on and on, while I stood beside her bed longing for her to cease so that I should be free to go out into the open air and sunshine, and drive slowly back through the woods.

Then suddenly, through the open window, I heard quite distinctly and quite near by the drumming, mating call of a greater spotted woodpecker. Leaning out through the window I looked towards a giant oak tree which stood almost directly opposite. At first I could not see the bird, but all at once the sonorous drumming began again and there, sure enough, was the gallant little bird, his scarlet capped head vibrating against a hollow bough. What a glorious sight and sound! I had seen and heard the same before but only from the ground and a long way off, but here it was happening only a few yards away, at the same level as myself. Again and again did that woodpecker drum. I could have spent an hour as audience to such a concert.

Then all at once the spell was broken. A moment before, the world had contained nothing but that woodpecker and me. Now our intimacy was being spoiled by an intruder—an outsider.

I could not see the intruder from where I leaned half out of the bedroom window, but I knew she was behind and watching me.

I tried to be calm and collect my thoughts. Whatever was I to do? What could I say to her to excuse such an unprofessional lapse?

I even attempted to reconstruct the scene of my progress from her bedside to the open window. I remembered the first note of the bird and simultaneously, it seemed to me, I was leaning out of the window. All memory of those intervening seconds was lost.

Some instinct told me she was no lover of birds. Useless then to throw myself on her kind mercy and plead my weakness and excuse my offence by confessing to her how the spotted woodpecker was my sweetheart of all our English birds.

She would never understand and never forgive. The

position I had got myself into was not an easy one to get out of with dignity or self-respect. All the same, I could not go on for ever hanging out of her bedroom window, she and the situation had to be faced, so turning away from the woodpecker, the oak tree, and the sunshine, I confronted my patient and—received my dismissal.

I had no excuse to offer. It was an ignominious retreat, and though I try to forget what she said, her words still smart.

My friend and rival, Dr. Bairn of Hythe, was called in in my place. He was not likely to commit such a lapse as I had, and in any case he did not know the call of a spotted woodpecker from the noise made by a threshing machine, nor the difference between the song of a woodlark and a tree pipit. But he was a sound practitioner and a level-headed doctor, not the sort to interrupt the flow of symptoms from a guinea patient.

All the same, my dismissal inflicted a sore wound to my self-esteem, which was not mollified by seeing Dr. Bairn pass my house each morning on his way to listen, not to a woodpecker's mating call, but to my late patient's song of woe; for which he was being paid, each session, just one golden guinea, which might have been mine.

But all this happened long ago and time does heal mental sores. After all, if I had earned fifty guineas, they would have been spent years gone by, leaving nothing to show now, while instead I have the vivid memory of that woodpecker, drumming, drumming, with the green oak leaves and the blue sky of a June day for a background, a picture which I shall never forget, and one which all the gold in the world could never buy.

It was a year later and I had just returned home after a long round. The number of patients I had visited had not itself been enough to occupy the whole morning. But a round on a warm day in June, which took you down

to the mouth of the river, across the mud-flats where the flowering cotton-grass bent before the sea breeze, all this with the crying of lapwings and the whistling of redshanks tended to slow progress. But in such a case and on such a day why hurry, with no rival doctor within miles and miles? My last visit of all had been to Mrs. Dwiggins in the village. She had become, during my two years of practice at Beaulieu, a regular and profitable patient. "Asthma," in inverted commas, was my diagnosis of her chest complaint, and under my care and treatment she had grown, day by day, no worse. After putting the car into the garage I went to the dispensary to mix the medicines for the patients I had seen that morning.

Scarcely had the cork been rammed home into the last bottle—for Mrs. Dwiggins—and just as I was writing the label there was a smart tap on the door.

"Come in," I cried, and slowly, but majestically, there entered the tall, uniformed figure of Sergeant Thomas, the village policeman. Strictly speaking his title of "Sergeant" was a euphemism, a tactful compliment paid him by the villagers. Officially he was only Constable, was born to be a constable and a policeman who by no possibility whatever could rise to any rank above that of village constable. He was a type of policeman common before the War, but one which has since then been ousted by the suave, polished young men of the old public schoolboy type who to-day constitute the force. Fortunately crime, even the most petty, was all but unknown to Beaulieu, which was as well, since Thomas was one of the most obtuse, dull-brained, and muddle-headed of men.

"Well, Sergeant," I cheerfully inquired, as I put the final dab of sealing-wax to Mrs. Dwiggins's bottle of medicine, "what's the trouble this time? A licence, I suppose; dog, car, driving, gun, or what?" The sergeant drew himself up, saluted, pulled down his tunic, coughed, looked all

round, closed the door and then said in a mysterious voice:

"I am making certain inquiries relating to a matter appertaining to an object which has been found."

"What exactly do you mean, Sergeant?" I replied. "What is it you have found?"

"It wasn't me found the object, sir, but a certain party found it, or at least reported finding it, and after consideration and taking into account the place where it was found, I decided to come straight to you, Doctor, to ask if it was yours."

"Thanks," I answered, "very good of you indeed, and what is the object?"

"It ain't customary in the force, sir," said the cautious constable, "to name an object found under such circumstances, and I must ask you to tell me if you have lost anything."

No, I could not remember having lost anything lately and told him so.

"Come now, please Doctor," the policeman urged, evidently disappointed, "can't you bring to mind something belonging to you which you have lost?"

This form of question and answer reminded me of that fireside game where the inquirer, in reply to questions, is allowed to answer only the two words "Yes" or "No."

"Now, then, Sergeant," said I, becoming at last a little weary of all this mystification, "out with it, and tell me what it is that has been found and then I can tell you at once if it belongs to me or not."

But the policeman was not going to be hurried, nor yet browbeaten. Rules are rules, regulations regulations, and in the force the rule is that the loser has got to say what he has lost and not the policeman what has been found. And doubtless a very wise precaution, too. Suppose, for example, a policeman went up to a man and asked, "Have you

by any chance lost a brown leather wallet containing four one pound notes and one ten shilling one? ” The man, if not as honest as he should be, might reply, “ Yes, I have—thank you very much; wherever did you find it?—here’s half a crown for your trouble; good morning.”

Sergeant Thomas was taking no such risks. He knew himself to be too old and too crafty a bird to be caught by my chaff. But I was in a hurry to go to lunch, and anyway the business had dragged on too long; so rather irritably I said, “ You might just as well tell me what it is you’ve found, and then I can tell you if it’s mine or not.”

With evident reluctance and misgivings the policeman agreed for once to break the rules, and from his coat-tail pocket brought forth, after a good deal of fumbling, my stethoscope, which he now confessed had been picked up just inside my own garden gate. I would have taken it then and there, but before parting with it the sergeant insisted I should first declare it to be my own property. At last I got cross. After scrutinizing the stethoscope I told the sergeant that, after all, I could not positively swear it was mine. It was my turn now to act with caution. I said that I thought now it was not my stethoscope, although it looked so like mine at first. Perhaps, I suggested, it belonged to one of the other doctors, Dr. Bairn, at Hythe, or Dr. Maturin or Dr. Statham, at Lymington, or Dr. Hutchinson, at Fawley, and I advised him to lose no time at all in restoring it to the rightful owner, for more than likely some patient’s life depended on it.

These words of mine began to have, I could see, an effect on the slowly working mind of the village policeman. He found himself now in a bit of a fix. Obviously a strange medical instrument found lying in the carriage-way of the only doctor within miles could scarcely belong to any other practitioner. However, feeling that by now the affair had lasted quite long enough and that it was up to me to end it, I

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proposed that the stethoscope should remain in my care, but promised to give it back if any other doctor claimed it. With a sigh of relief the sergeant handed it over to me and wished me good-day.

“By the way, Sergeant,” I called out as he left, “it’s a hot and thirsty day, why not go round to the back door and ask Annie for a glass of beer?”

CHAPTER III

GREAT changes have taken place in English country life since the War and these changes are going on daily. Some are regrettable, others the reverse, and all are inevitable. To a large extent the fault lies with London, the tentacles of the *Great Wen* have now insinuated themselves into almost every village, hamlet, and township in Surrey, Sussex, and Kent, turning them into suburbs. Few of the old self-contained rural communities have been spared within a radius of fifty miles of the capital. The days of the proud old feudal families, which ruled for generations each its own little principality, and on the whole ruled kindly and justly, are numbered. In many ways the English countryside will suffer with the breaking up of the big estates. Some of the families have had the foresight to recognize in time the inevitable and to take steps to meet it. For generations the sons entered the Services or the Church, if they entered any profession at all, or remained lifelong country squires and gentlemen. The wise ones face the inevitable and seek to earn money in financial houses in the City or even enter into retail trade. How their ancestors must squirm in their family vaults! There are some of these old landed families who still refuse to face the fact that the old order is changing—has already changed—and still hope that in spite of death duties, in spite of tax upon tax, in spite of public opinion, they can continue to live happily and comfortably on their broad acres as their forefathers lived before them. Let us invent a typical example. The old squire dies and the estate is inherited by his only son, a young man still in his 'teens. The estate, owing to penal death duties, has to be mortgaged up to the hilt. The fine old Elizabethan house

which cannot any longer be kept up is leased to a rich City man without a family tree but with brains and a long bank balance; the progenitor of a new aristocracy. The handsome rent the landlord receives enables him and his family to live comfortably in the dower house on another part of the estate, and still to cut a figure in the county even if it is a smaller one than formerly.

But it is not often in these days that an impoverished landlord is fortunate enough to find a rich tenant to take over his ancestral house and grounds. The supply of rich and obliging American millionaires seems to have become exhausted. More often these big houses are sold to become schools or asylums for the insane, or, worse still, fall into the ruthless hands of the speculative builder who pulls down the great house, fells all the old timber, and builds as many small houses on the land as he can squeeze in. The county families have had their day and a very good one while it lasted, but nothing, not even the squirearchy, can go on for ever. The old order is passing to make room for the new. One cannot but feel sorry for them, for even their social influence is going as well. No longer does the lady at the big house decide who is, and who is not, worth while knowing. New-comers to a neighbourhood are apt to be unimpressed by the faded grandeur of the local county family, and generally prefer to make their own friends with whom they have ideas in common. If they are people who are occupied in doing anything interesting or useful, they find conversations confined almost entirely to hunting, or gossip about people they have never heard of before, somewhat irksome. Even if the motor-car has done much to spoil the amenities of the country, it must be given credit for having made it possible for people living in the country to keep in touch with their friends in London and elsewhere, and so save them from relying almost entirely on their near neighbours for sociability. The squire's lady no longer

rules the parochial roast, though she still can rule the Women's Institute and keep the vicar up to the mark.

Certainly one of the most welcome innovations in country life is the decline of the formal afternoon call. This dying social custom of exchanging calls, which will soon become one of quaint historic interest, was once a very real evil. The other day I was reading a novel dealing with life in England towards the end of the last century. The hero had retired to an obscure country village in order to carry out some important piece of work undisturbed. To his annoyance some of the local gentry called, which caused him to write to a friend in the following words: "I had steadily repelled any attempt on the part of the aborigines to establish social relations with me, but . . ."

The hero seems to have held very strong and very sensible views on this matter of social calls.

One of our early callers was a rather grand sporting lady. The three of us sat in a group near the drawing-room fire. Conversation began to languish when the sporting lady asked if we hunted. When we confessed we did not she said what a pity that was, for on the hunting field you met all the nicest people. Yet, strangely enough, although we do not hunt we have found some nice and very dear neighbours who, more oddly still, do not hunt either. And none of the village cricket team hunt, and they are quite nice and also very interesting to talk to, as well as good fellows to play an afternoon's cricket with.

The hunting lady reminded us of an English lady visiting an American friend of ours in Vermont who recounted the incident with glee because she considered it so intensely English. Let us call the English lady the Hon. Mrs. Pepys Peverell and our American friend Mrs. Jefferson. The scene took place in the drawing-room of Mrs. Jefferson's house in Vermont. The conversation was about Mrs. Pepys Peverell's house in England.

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Mrs. J.: "Have you many neighbours at your home in England, Mrs. Pepys Peverell?"

Mrs. P.: "Oh dear no! I live in a most remote part of Hampshire, quite isolated, not a neighbour within miles. There is no one to speak to but the servants."

Mrs. J.: "None at all?"

Mrs. P.: "Well, of course, there's the rector, dear Mr. Wellbeloved, one of the Stanton Wellbeloveds, you know."

Mrs. J.: "How very extraordinary. I had no idea there were houses in the South of England so isolated."

Mrs. P.: "Of course there's Dr. Clarke, but I don't count him."

Mrs. J.: "How very interesting. Your village then only contains you and your household, the clergyman and the doctor and no one else?"

Mrs. P.: "That's all—except just the cottagers and farmers."

One day a large car came purring up the drive—callers! It had brought down from London an old lady, a friend of my wife's mother, and another elderly lady whom neither of us knew. After tea we all strolled about the garden, and while my wife and her mother's friend talked of various people known to both, I took charge of the friend. I found conversation a bit difficult, and I am sure she thought me a dull dog. I tried my best, pointed out the various landmarks and named some of the grand or historic houses in the neighbourhood. She appeared to know a lot about these, so I said to her, "You seem to know this part of the country well; I suppose you have stayed near here sometimes." "No," replied the friend, "but you see one of my sisters married a Thistlethwaite." Coward and snob that I am, I pretended to know all about the Thistlethwaites, and said that no wonder she knew the district so well.

Some of our most delightful neighbours are the farmers. How on earth farmers manage to make both ends meet I have never been able to fathom, but somehow or other they go on year after year, cheerful if not prosperous. How they do so, by growing crops which they sell at a loss, and by breeding calves, pigs, and lambs to sell at the market for less than it cost to rear them, is one of those mysteries of economics which I shall never comprehend. I like talking to farmers, they are always interesting, and this is not because I know anything about farming. Indeed, until this moment I had forgotten that I once was a sort of farmer myself. When I reached the age of sixteen I was superannuated from Haileybury, under a rule by which any boy who attained that age and who was still in the lower school had to leave. My father was a good deal upset at this—as well he might be—and came down to the school to ask the head master what he had better do with me. The head master told my father that he did not consider my mental equipment sufficient for any learned profession or career requiring brains, and advised him to make a farmer of me. What grounds the head master had for thinking that farmers could succeed without brains I do not know.

Anyhow, there it was and I was packed off to an Agricultural College in Lincolnshire. How well do I remember my first arrival there and how inauspicious it was. I had left Haileybury under a slight cloud, not that I had been particularly vicious, but with a reputation for idleness and misbehaviour. Now I was determined to mend my ways and start afresh with a clean sheet and never cause my father or my schoolmasters another moment's worry or anxiety. As a new boy I arrived at the school, with another new boy, several hours before the rest. This was the wish of the head master, in order that we new boys might be able to settle down quietly. On arriving at Hellingham Hall we were ushered into the head master's study, where we waited

with that uncomfortable feeling all boys experience in such circumstances and places. We had not waited long when in bustled our new head master, a short, alert-looking, thick-set man with bright, piercing eyes and a closely trimmed beard. With a welcoming smile he approached me and held out his hand. Thinking he wished to shake mine, I put out my hand too, when to my surprise and horror his right hand darted towards my handkerchief pocket and in a trice extracted from it a Derringer pistol. Those eagle eyes had observed the tip of the barrel. This accident made a most unfortunate first impression and gave, I felt, quite a wrong one about me and my good resolutions for the future. After this regrettable incident he made me disgorge my ammunition and then, as though all this was not enough shame to put me to before my colleague, this ruthless tyrant, forgetting I was in a sense his guest, made me turn out all my pockets and lay on his desk catapult, cigarettes, matches, sweets, as well as all the other treasures so dear to the heart of a schoolboy. This done, a short lecture followed, and my companion and I were dismissed to explore the school and grounds. I had not been in the company of my new friend for more than half an hour when a devastating thought began to occur to me. Was I mad, and was this school really a private asylum? I had heard that often mad people did not know they were mad, and were sent to asylums which their relatives and friends pretended were hotels or schools. My cause for this disturbing train of thought was my companion. He was a very overgrown boy for his age, his face was covered with pimples and he undoubtedly was half-witted. When in due time the other boys arrived, I felt reassured. If ever there was a collection of scamps this was one, but they were not mad. Almost every public school was represented, and many a school-master must have heaved a sigh of relief to see the last of his pupils.

The story of my Derringer pistol soon became public property, and I feared I should be made to suffer for it. But, on the contrary, I found that already I had gained some kind of kudos as a carrier of a lethal weapon, though some adverse comment was passed on my being so careless as to let "Old Mac" see it. Several of the bigger boys had brought back shot-guns with them, which had the ends of the barrels sawn off, to make them short enough to be hidden under their coats or down the legs of their trousers. These guns were packed amongst their clothes and were quickly concealed, with the cartridges, in various hiding-places. On looking back now, I see what a truly remarkable man that head master was, for he had as pupils some fifty or sixty budding gangsters, and yet there was never really any serious trouble in the school during the eighteen months I was there.

The school building was a vast grey stone house that belonged to an impoverished country gentleman who had fallen on bad times, and who probably was glad to let such a white elephant for a reasonable rent. Mr. McAdam must have done very well by his school. Besides the big house there were extensive stables and farm buildings, and spacious vegetable gardens, fruit orchards, and glass-houses. We were not taught much about the science or theory of farming, but worked as labourers, very lazy and inefficient labourers. I dare say any three of us did about as much work in a day as one honest labouring man. But the reason why Mr. McAdam made his school pay so well was that the parent of each of his inefficient labourers paid him somewhere about £150 per annum, which meant that instead of having to pay out wages he received from his workmen some £8,000 a year. And in addition to this we were fed on the excellent food we grew ourselves on the farm. What the school did not consume was sent to market to be sold. Mr. McAdam seemed to have solved the problem of

how to make farming pay. We all took our turn at different branches of gardening and farming. One month you groomed and fed horses, cut chaff, or worked at the smithy shoeing horses. Another you spent in the vegetable gardens and hot-houses. There was carting to be done, ploughing, harrowing, and haymaking. Milking and dairy work was taught as well. Milking was a pleasant occupation in spite of the early rising, particularly in the summer term, but I got into a scrape over it and still think the head master was not altogether free from blame.

Each "cow-boy" was put in charge of one cow, which he had to tend, feed, and milk. At the end of the week the school assembled in the big hall and the week's reports were read out. When it came to the milk records, the number of gallons of milk from each cow was announced, and the boys whose cows headed the list were held up as examples to those whose cows had produced less. The cow allotted to me was a small black Kerry, called Gipsy. I was very proud and very fond of her. In the morning we used to round up the herd and, if no master was present, each "cow-boy" rode his cow to the milking shed, which led to much merriment and not a few tosses. I became quite a good milker before long, but naturally my little Kerry could not compete with the Jersey or Guernsey cows, and she was always at the bottom of the list when the Saturday reports were read out. This was adversely commented on by Mr. McAdam for two or three weeks, and I began to look forward with apprehension to his sarcastic remarks about me and Gipsy. Then it was the idea occurred to me to add a little water to the milk-pail each day before handing it in to be measured. At the end of that week Gipsy was reported to have given several more pints than previously and I was publicly commended, but not without a hint that by exerting myself I could do better still. And I did. Public applause is a dangerous thing. It is like a sedative

drug; once a taste for it has been formed the addict yearns for more. I was not accustomed to praise from school-masters, either in public or in private. Perhaps I lost my head, certainly I lost my sense of discretion, for the following week I added such a large quantity of water to the milk that it was announced that Gipsy—due to some sort of lacteal spate—had given more milk than any other cow. The applause was long and loud, but trouble was brewing. Having brought Gipsy to such a pitch of abundance it was impossible to reduce it, and the dilution had to be continued. Suspicion was aroused, the milk tested, my fraud detected, and myself publicly exposed and privately punished.

It was in the Christmas holidays that Cupid first pierced my heart with his arrow, or, in plain language, I fell in love.

Winnie was her lovely name, fifteen her age. We first met at a Christmas party at her father's home in Cumberland Place. Mr. Chandler I regarded with feelings of the deepest respect and envied him his endless opportunity for close intimacy with his charming daughter. I think Winnie must have had Italian or Spanish blood in her veins, her hair was so black, her complexion so snowy white, her eyes so large and melting. One glance from those dark eyes of hers made me her abject slave. When I returned to school at the end of the holidays my head and heart were in a whirl. I could think of nothing and nobody but Winnie Chandler. I confided the secret of my passion to a young school friend. I was inexperienced, and as he had had several affairs of the heart himself, I begged him to help me by telling me how I ought to pay my addresses to my lady-love. This lady-killer assured me that nothing gained a woman's love better than a gift of jewellery. Now this useful piece of information placed me in a position of some difficulty. The whole of my private income was one shilling a week, and I seldom received the whole of this sum, for on Friday nights, when

Mr. McAdam paid us our pocket-money, I had generally forfeited several pence in fines for leaving my books about. Thus it was the truth soon dawned on me that the funds at my command were hardly likely to be sufficient to purchase even the cheapest pinchbeck jewellery at one of the Lincoln shops. But love will always find a way. I would make Winnie a piece of jewellery with my own hands, which she could wear and which would constantly keep me in her thoughts. We were studying chemistry at the time, so I set to work on a penny piece. First of all I polished one side of the coin until it had a smooth surface. Next I drilled a hole in it through which a coloured ribbon could later be threaded and, happy ribbon, encircle the neck of my lovely Winnie. But there was still the engraving to be done. I melted some candle-wax and poured it over the smooth surface of the penny, and when it became cold and set, I took a pointed instrument and with great care scratched her initials on the penny through the wax. Now came in my newly acquired chemical knowledge. Procuring some strong nitric acid, I poured a little over the wax and put away the penny in a safe place for the acid to do its work. In due time I washed away the acid, and on removing the wax, lo and behold there were her initials, clearly bitten into the copper coin in bold letters—W. C. Not till that moment had it occurred to me that Winnie's initials did not lend themselves to such a simple form of monogram. Winnie never got her piece of jewellery and therefore never knew of the love which she had stirred. It was a bitter disappointment. I do not know if the Automatic Machine Company found any special use for the penny with W. C. engraved on it, which had purchased for me a bar of chocolate from their machine which stood outside the railway station at Lincoln.

The following summer holiday was an exciting adventure for any schoolboy. My father allowed me to go all

alone to Newfoundland to stay with his friend Judge Prowse, a highly finished eccentric and one of the keenest fishermen I ever knew. I enjoyed every moment of that holiday, the voyage out and back in the slow old ship which sailed between Liverpool and St. John's, and the snipe shooting and trout fishing with the judge. Nor, must it be confessed, did the memory of Winnie come between me and my pleasure.

When I returned to school I boasted to envious listeners of my adventures in Newfoundland, told them of my many hairbreadth escapes and of the dangerous situations I had encountered in that far-off unexplored island. One Sunday morning while we were all assembled in the hall waiting to march to church I produced from my pocket a roll of American chewing tobacco, hard, black, and sticky. Out there in Newfoundland, I explained, we all chewed tobacco all day long.

I had not intended to pursue the matter further when Birch, a powerful boy and a bit of a bully, said out loud that he did not believe I had ever chewed tobacco. Such a challenge, thrown down before a cloud of hostile witnesses, could not be declined, although as a matter of fact I had used tobacco only occasionally to smoke. As it was almost time to start for church, I tried to postpone the demonstration by saying I had come without my pocket-knife with which to cut the quid. Half a dozen pocket-knives were instantly produced and proffered. Very slowly and carefully I cut a not-too-generous quid of tobacco, and in front of the spectators placed it in my cheek. Several doubting Thomases then felt the bulge in my cheek to assure themselves that there was no deception. I had intended to get rid of the quid during the walk to church, but all the way there I was closely attended by a group of officious and suspicious admirers who kept an eagle eye on my every action. For some reason which I forget, and which in any

case I have no wish to recall, I did not sit in church with the other boys, but in the front row, between two masters. How gratified my parents would have felt had they been able to see their only son and heir seated in such distinguished company, in full view of the whole congregation. At first I felt proud, and enjoyed turning my head round so that the boys behind could see the bulge in my cheek. But this happy mood did not last very long. An odd sensation began to spread over me. I felt cold, although it was a hot day; my skin began to turn cold and clammy and I began to sweat and feel faint. Then I commenced to yawn and take deep breaths. Then worse symptoms appeared and I knew that at any cost that quid must be got rid of, but of course without attracting the notice of the two masters or, even worse, that of my colleagues behind. The simple and obvious thing to do was to pretend to blow my nose and to slip the pestilent quid into my handkerchief and so get rid of it. But as always seemed to happen to me just when a handkerchief was most needed, I had come without one. At last, driven desperate, and as we knelt at prayer, I snatched the quid from out my burning mouth and slipped it between the leaves of the prayer book, a large one lent me by one of the masters. It had been given to him by his mother, according to the inscription on the fly-leaf.

This brings my unhappy story towards its close. At the conclusion of the prayers, as the congregation rose to sing a hymn, the whole edifice began to sway round and round, and the very worst that could happen, happened. I was hurried out of the church and laid gently down in the cool shade of a yew tree. As I lay there with closed eyes I overheard one of the masters who had helped to bring me out say to the other one that evidently the heat in the church had been too much for me. The masters, who seemed to be in no hurry to return, bade me lie still until I felt quite

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strong again, and they went a little way off to smoke cigarettes.

The following summer, at the age of seventeen, my education being completed—I could skin a bird and play a good game of knucklebones—I left school to join an expedition to South America as naturalist.

CHAPTER IV

FEUDALISM still persists in nooks and corners of the English counties, and this in spite of democracy, which is a by-product of urbanism, and in spite of the electrification of the railways and of the motor-car. Though dying, feudalism expires reluctantly and slowly. I remember one occasion—it was, I think, a year before the War—having to pay a professional visit to the house of the late Lord Montagu of Beaulieu's head gamekeeper. The cottage stood buried in the depths of an oak wood, but was connected with the Palace House by a private telephone. While Mrs. Robbins, the keeper's wife, and I were in consultation in the parlour, the telephone bell tinkled. Mrs. Robbins arose, took up the receiver, and the following monologue took place:

Mrs. Robbins: "Who? Who is it? I can't hear."

"Oh! beg pardon, my lord" (deep curtsy).

"No, my lord, he's out at the pheasant coops" (curtsy).

"Very good, my lord, I will tell him directly he comes in" (curtsy).

"Yes, your lordship, I won't forget" (extra deep curtsy).

This charming ceremony impressed me at the time as being a fine example of the respect for her over-lord by a retainer. Another example occurs to me of this old-fashioned courtesy between master and servant, which also happened at Beaulieu. Lord Montagu owned an Irish setter called Kelly, which was his constant companion. On Friday nights Kelly used to sit beside Teddy Stevens, the chauffeur, when the car went to meet Lord Montagu at Brockenhurst station. From that moment until the following Monday morning the dog never left his master's

side. The two were inseparable friends. I noticed that whenever the servants or keepers spoke of the dog to each other they always referred to him as *Master Kelly*. Some people, with Socialistic tendencies, resent all this sort of thing, which they maintain is nothing else but a manifestation of servile class distinction. But they are wrong, for it is only an old-fashioned—if you will—expression of respect and affection. Once a Scotsman, a Liberal with a strong bias towards Socialism, came to stop with us. As I had my work to do, he used to drive with me in my car as I went on my daily round. Now and again we would pass a peasant woman or a bevy of little girls returning from school. As we passed by they all would stop and curtsy. This was not done because I was one of the “great and good”—I was only the village doctor—but simply because they knew me and, I believe, liked me. But this bending of the knees infuriated my Scotch friend, who assured me that such a degrading spectacle would be impossible at his home at Dunfermline. Possibly in that enchanted backwater of Hampshire we were a good many years behind the times and behind Dunfermline, and I dare say by now curtsying has ceased. Certainly I have not seen it done down here in Sussex, but that does not mean that feudalism is dead in Sussex. The country people still love an hereditary landlord, and would far rather be bullied and browbeaten by “the squire” than have as landlord a new-comer, or, still worse, a soulless corporation or building society.

Our gardener complained to me one day of the damage done to his garden by the swarms of tame pheasants which are reared in the coppice close by his cottage and which had destroyed the vegetables he grows for his own use.

At once I suggested a very simple remedy, one that would save his vegetables and at the same time provide a welcome addition to his larder. Gale’s expression of horror I shall

not easily forget. If I had proposed he should kidnap the squire's baby daughter or poison a fox he could not have been more shocked. I tried to find out why he thought it such a monstrous thing to take practical steps to defend his property, but could get no satisfactory answer. In the end I advised him to speak to the head keeper about the pheasants and ask him to do something about them. But evidently he was convinced in his mind that if he complained the landlord might turn him and his family out of his cottage. So it is with many of the farmers who dare not forbid the hunt to ride over their fields, nor protest against the damage done by the pheasants, or the even greater damage to hedges and fences done by the beaters, for fear of reprisals when their leases are due for renewal. Owing to the shortage of labourers' cottages on most large estates a man who gets turned out of his has great difficulty in finding another in the same neighbourhood.

It is owing to the present position landowners are in, largely due to heavy taxation and death duties, that few of them can afford to build cottages to let to working men at an uneconomic rent. But all of this crying shortage of labourers' cottages is not due directly to the taxation of big estates, but to the landlords themselves. A landlord takes one of his cottages standing in some attractive situation which brings him in half a crown a week, makes a few structural alterations, puts in a bathroom and an inside lavatory, the whole costing him perhaps a hundred pounds, and lets it to a retired civil servant for a pound or more a week. This would not matter if the landowner built at the same time a new cottage for the labourer who has been turned out for the pound-a-week tenant. A law which compelled a landlord to build a new workman's cottage whenever he adapted an old one for a higher rent would meet this contingency.

Another cause of the shortage of cottages is that the

landowner will sell or lease a plot of land to a gentleman to build a house without making it a condition that the tenant shall build a cottage as well as a house. After the new house is up and occupied a gardener will be wanted. There may be a room in the house or over the garage for an unmarried chauffeur to sleep, but gardeners are always married men with families.

So either the landlord turns a labourer out of a neighbouring cottage or else the gardener must shift for himself in lodgings or find a cottage perhaps miles away from the place where he works. Not only would I like to see a law to make landlords build more cottages, but another to compel him to plant a tree, or two trees, wherever he felled one.

If, as some people believe, and others hope, the days of the landed gentry are numbered, let us pray that soon a Government will arise which will have the honesty, courage, and breadth of vision to save what still remains unspoiled of rural England from the speculative builder and his brother vandals. A good landowner, particularly if his family has owned the estate for several generations, generally loves the place and takes a pride in handing his property down to his heir in as good a state as when he received it. As things are at present in this country, where there are practically no enforceable laws to prevent vulgar abuse of both villages and countryside, it is only the villages and land which still belong to some hereditary landlord which remain unspoiled. Two lovely villages of this sort occur to mind—one in Somerset, the other in Wiltshire—and for very good reasons they shall be nameless. I believe they both belong to ladies whose families have owned them for centuries. But for these two benevolent autocrats who jealously protect what it is their privilege to own these lovely villages would long ago have fallen into the hands of the barbarians.

There is no doubt whatever that the principal spoiler of

the countryside is the motor-car. It is an ironical thought that the very people who have made it possible for the public to explore the beauties of their own country, that is to say the motor-car manufacturers, should be the ones who have done more than any others to disfigure it. I do not understand why it is impossible to sell a motor-car, or any of the component parts which go with it or make it go, without displaying hideous posters, signs, and garish petrol pumps. How often do you arrive at some old-world village which would be perfect if it had no motor garage or filling station.

Another great destroyer of the beautiful is the speculative builder who loves to pull down park walls, cut down trees, and, having cleared away all that is beautiful, to put up his hideous little bungalows in rows. Another offender is the brewer. Not all brewers, for there are some who take great pride in their old inns and public-houses. Those who have travelled by road from Winchester towards Salisbury cannot have failed to observe a huge blue-and-white enamel sign standing in a commanding position at the side of the road, on which is written "You're in the Strong Country." You ask yourself, "The Strong Country"—whatever is that? You know, or at least know of, "The Hardy Country," but why have you never before heard of "The Strong Country," and who is or was Strong? You will soon learn, for on almost every inn, tavern, and public-house you pass for the next hour or two you will observe the same thing, a long blue-and-white enamel sign with "Strong of Romsey, Brewers" on it. But what is far worse is that this company has, in every case we came across, taken down the old swinging painted sign-board, of the Rose and Crown, or the White Horse, as the case might be, and has hung up instead a vulgar iron sign on which is written in ugly blue-and-white enamel the name of the inn. I suppose that by doing this

the brewers hope to advertise their beer, but if they as a company gain by this the villages and hamlets in "The Strong Country" are heavy losers in appearance and picturesqueness.

But all the fault does not lie with the motor industry, the local speculative builders, or the brewers. In this corner of Sussex another sinister agent is at work. As long as the railway to the coast was steam-driven, changes went on slowly and normally; but of late the lines have been electrified. Why this change of motive power should make so profound a difference I do not know, but the fact remains that suburbanism follows electricity as sure as winter follows summer.

The whole south coast of England from the South Foreland to Poole is now practically one long suburb of London. There are still a few isolated spots which have not as yet been "developed" by the speculative builder. Cuckmere Haven is one of them, a lovely dip in the white chalk cliffs where the Cuckmere river ends its winding course from Alfriston. But it is bound to go the way of the rest of the coast; there seem to be no powers to prevent it. Only a few years ago it was a pleasant walk or drive along the upper coast road from Hove to Worthing. Go along it now—or rather don't—with its miles of silly little crowded bungalows and villas, built anyhow, and without a thought for dignity, arrangement, or planning. The same thing has now happened to the west of Worthing, where the clean fields used to run down to join the seashore. Only two or three years ago it was possible to picnic and bathe on the beach, and children could run about and play games in the fields. Then enterprising speculators with no souls saw their way to make more money, and they built houses along the whole coast, and a visitor is lucky if he can find a right of way between the new houses to get as much as a sight of the sea—"Sussex by the Sea!" If only a simple law had been

passed five years ago, a law without any loopholes for clever lawyers, forbidding any house or building being erected within half a mile of the seashore, this last piece of coast would have been saved for the people for all time.

If I spoke harshly just now of the Southern Railway and the results of the electrification of their line, let me add a postscript in its favour and in favour of travelling in trains. Suppose a foreigner should venture to explore the South of England by motor-car. What will he discover but an England plastered with hoardings, petrol filling-stations, bungalows, tea-shops, and shanties? Well might he suppose that the two principal industries of the English were the supplying of teas and petrol. Teas, "dainty" and otherwise, are scattered throughout the land, and where there is a tea-shop there will be a filling-station. Should a filling-station find room to squeeze in between two others, it will immediately be joined by another tea-shop. If our foreign friend wishes to see Sussex at its best, let him avoid the roads and instead travel with us from Victoria Station by train—third class will do—to Steyning, via Dorking and Horsham.

We choose a fine sunny day for the expedition, and time must be of no account. We shall do well to read our newspaper until Dorking, the last London suburb, is left behind, but after that shall be better occupied looking out of the carriage windows, for the real country has begun. At Horsham we will change trains into an old-fashioned railway carriage on the local line to Steyning, and the best part of the journey has begun. Not too rapidly we wind our way through green meadows and freshly ploughed brown fields, with the glowing South Downs always in the distance, and the black ring of Chanctonbury surmounting all. A plough, drawn by three stalwart horses, goes slowly along with none of the noise of modern mechanism. The pleasant prospect on either side is unspoiled by ugly hoard-

ings, which on the main roads shout aloud at you to buy their tooth-paste, petrol, or British lager beer. The railway companies might be well advised to advertise the fact that they can offer such pleasant prospects from their carriage windows.

Here and there stands an old farm, with its thatched barn or a farm labourer's cottage. There are big woods and small spinneys in place of tall factory chimneys and mean bungalows. Wild flowers grow and bloom, unpicked and untrampled, on the steep banks of the cutting where the train goes through some slight incline. No women or children stand by the railway track as they do by the motor roads in the spring, with outstretched hands grasping tired bundles of pale primroses, lent lilies, drooping bluebells, or yellow cowslips, flowers torn from the meadows and woods where they belong. Brown men, brown like the mother earth where they were born and bred, and from which for generations they have won their living, move slowly about their concerns.

As our train draws nearer to the Downs, it seems to lose its way. Sometimes we see Chanctonbury Ring through the right-hand window, and a moment later it has disappeared, to reappear suddenly at the opposite side. To me the sight of the Ring is doubly precious, for it is the first object to be seen on looking out of my bedroom window each morning, where it stands sentinel over Crossbows all day long, and when at night I open the casement to see what sort of a night it is, there the Ring looms up in the sky above, dark but friendly.

At last our engine, which has apparently lost its way, descries the Ring and, gathering speed, makes straight towards it, and, if you are new to the journey, you begin to gather together your hand-luggage. But suddenly the engine remembers Partridge Green and the train swings sharply to the left, leaving the Ring behind us. From

time to time we stop at small wayside stations where one or two country people with numerous parcels get in or out, moving slowly as is the countryman's way, with many welcomes and farewells to their fellow-travellers. At each station our guard discusses with the railway porter the hopes and fortunes of the local football team, so that by the time we reach our destination we have become authorities on the Brighton and Hove Football Club, and have learned how far higher a place in the League the team would hold if only Alf Brown played outside left instead of inside right.

A red-faced hunting squire—he can be nothing else—enters our carriage at Partridge Green. He is bursting with conversation and, after trying us with horse and hound, somehow tumbles on a subject of common interest in birds and we all get on famously. He turns out to be a younger son of a local county family and travels about Sussex purchasing horses for army remounts.

Surely our journey is nearly over by now; the square bluff Norman tower of Steyning Church, where the body of King Alfred the Great was buried, is clearly in view. But somehow the train has got entangled in the windings of the river Adur, and we wander hither and thither in the water meadows looking for a bridge to cross it by.

But at last our journey is over and we are being greeted by our smiling friends, the station-master and porters on Steyning station. More than two hours to travel less than fifty miles; poor time when compared with the flying Brighton Belle or a motor-car, but not a minute too long, for we have seen England of a century ago which we could never have done from the Brighton express or a motor-car.

Three miles by road and we shall be home—first along Church Street, which is much as it was a hundred or two hundred years ago, past the Grammar School and its fine old Brotherhood Hall, past the fifteenth-century cottages, past the old Stone Prison, then up the High Street, which

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in spite of certain regrettable "improvements" is still picturesque.

Every minute takes us nearer the Ring, which has been in sight for the last hour. Then the car swings to the left, goes up the winding lane with its deep-cut sandy banks, and suddenly there before us is Crossbows and, overshadowing it, Chanctonbury Ring. Our journey is over and we are home.

CHAPTER V

THE mutilation of the English countryside goes on apace, principally at the hands of the motor trade and the bill-posting contractor and the builder. For several decades these leaders of modern commercial enterprise have had the field to themselves, and have done their work most thoroughly. Only now and again has some small still voice been heard to protest against their ruthless activities. But what good can possibly come of such isolated protests against the close serried ranks of the exploiters? However, during the last few years there have appeared signs that more and more people are beginning to resent the spoliation of the land by these adventurers who will spare nothing to make a dishonest pound. Several societies have come into existence, formed by enthusiasts and optimists who believe that by united action something can still be done to keep in check the selfish and grabbing advertisers and speculative builders, and although much is already spoiled beyond repair, they hope at least to save some of what is left. Such praiseworthy bodies as the National Trust, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Scapa Society—for checking the abuses of advertising—and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, to name but four of the most important, have already done fine work in a fine cause. It is largely due to their untiring efforts that the Advertisement Regulation Acts and by-laws were passed, which have already brought about considerable improvement in such districts as have enlightened county councils, which will use the powers they have been given.

It was the coming into the open market of a group of

three of the oldest cottages in the town which brought into being the Steyning Preservation Society. These particular cottages are perfect examples of sixteenth-century English domestic architecture of the humbler sort. They stand in the middle of the town and form one of the principal attractions of Steyning. When the old lady died to whom they belonged, her trustees were compelled by her will to put the cottages up to public auction. There are still a number of such cottages in the town, though not all as old as these, which, standing in a row as they do next to the old Grammar School, form part of the loveliest street in Steyning. There was good reason to be alarmed at the prospect of a public sale. In too many similar cases of late the same thing had followed a public sale of old cottages. There was the glaring example of the ancient cottage which stands at a corner next the old almshouses. The rent of this cottage was half a crown a week before it was bought by a small speculative builder. The new owner proceeded to knock out the old small-paned bow-windows and put in their place a plate-glass one. Above this he erected a large enamel iron name-plate of several colours. The original door and carved oak pillars were removed and a larger ugly deal door put up in its place. The front parlour was fitted with shelves and a counter, and the shop was let to a small general trader at a rent of one pound a week. The new tenant proceeded to plaster the outside walls with garish advertisements of cigarettes, sweets, tea, and other commodities. The result was that the builder made a very handsome profit on his capital, and that the harmonious and dignified appearance of that end of the town was ruined. This was only one example of many of the kind, and not a word of protest was ever raised by the townspeople. When spoken to about it, the tradesmen and others living in the same street admitted they disliked very much what had been done, but any idea of protesting, or of taking any active steps

to prevent it or any further outrages, appeared to be outside their field of vision or imagination. When the news of the sale of the row of old cottages was announced, a few residents called together a small meeting to discuss the situation and see whether anything could be done to thwart the inevitable speculative builder from buying and spoiling them.

Thus it was that the Steyning Preservation Society came into being. It was decided first of all to form a fairly large but thoroughly representative general committee. It was agreed that the society should include all classes of the community and, above all, not appear to be one of those pet fads of the "gentry" which are regarded with such suspicion and dislike by the poorer classes. So a committee was formed which included one or two representatives of the "county," a popular hunting woman magistrate, a builder, one or two retired army officers, a lady member of the rural district council, a clergyman, a tanner, a popular B.B.C. broadcaster, a landowner, a doctor, the head master of a big public school, a coal merchant, the head master of the Grammar School, with a distinguished painter, Mr. Bertram Nicholls, president of the R.B.A., for chairman. Some difficulty arose over the choice of a secretary, but eventually a not-very-efficient one was found to take on this unpaid and unhonoured post. With a general committee such as this, nobody, however class-sensitive, could complain that the new society was a hobby of the "idle rich." Nor could anybody refuse to join it on the plea of expense, since the annual subscription was put at the minimum sum of one shilling.

As to rules, we made none, a wise decision which other newly formed societies might well follow. The objects of the society were defined as follows: "To preserve the amenities of Steyning and district, and especially buildings of historical and architectural interest." This statement,

although brief, seemed to meet any contingency which might arise, and enabled us, if we wished, to deal with such miscreants as egg-collectors, killers of rare birds or beasts, flower-pullers, litter-louts, and other pests.

To give the society a good send-off Mr. A. R. Powys, secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, came all the way down to Steyning to deliver a public lecture in the town hall. A series of photographs was specially taken of various houses and cottages in the town, from which lantern slides were prepared to illustrate the lecture. The great event was duly advertised, and it was with some anxiety that those of us who were responsible for the whole scheme waited at the hall before the doors were opened. I had an alarming vision of the large hall with a small scattered audience which would have to be invited to come forward to occupy the two front benches. But as soon as the doors opened our spirits rose. People flocked in, men, women, and children. The show was free. The hall had seating accommodation for some three hundred, but before the lecture began every chair was occupied and there were people standing all round the room. The lantern slides were excellent, and Mr. Powys, an accomplished lecturer, held the attention of his audience from start to finish. At the close of the lecture, the chairman announced that he hoped many of those present would join the society and sign their names and pay their subscriptions before leaving. More than one hundred did so; none too bad for a small place like Steyning, and they proved by joining that there were more people than we suspected who appreciated the old town.

All these details about the birth and infant welfare of our very humble society may seem of insufficient importance to write about in a book; but I hope by doing so to stimulate others to do likewise, so that similar societies may be formed all over the country. Although each society would

be able to do little by itself, the fact that in almost every town or village some such body existed to keep a watch over its own locality and on the activities of the builder and advertiser, to say nothing of the rural district council, could result in nothing but good.

The morning after the lecture and the formation of the S.P.S. as I was driving Mr. Powys to catch an early train at Steyning and we entered the village, we were confronted by a fresh horror, a large poster on a tall, new hoarding. This unseemly welcome to the town had sprung up in the night and seemed to have been erected to shout defiance at the new society. I decided there and then that we should accept the challenge so insolently thrown down. Little did I guess in my innocence the difficulties which lay before us or foresee the lessons we were about to learn concerning the mind of advertisers. Since that morning I often have had reason to recall the truth of Mr. Powys's warning not to expect too much, and that if our society succeeded in but one case in every ten they tackled they might congratulate themselves.

This poster, as posters go, was not too bad; it was the principle of the thing which made it necessary to take action. It depicted in vivid colours a gigantic loaf, beside which lay a bread-knife of suitable size, ready to cut slices of bread for a giant's family. In big letters were acclaimed the benefits to be derived by eating bread made from a particular flour, ground by a unique method by Messrs.—, of—. The hoarding stood in front of the end wall of an old red-brick house and faced all travellers as they entered the town from the north.

The campaign was at once begun. It was discovered that a new baker just set up in business was responsible. Every argument was tried in vain to persuade him to remove it. It was pointed out to him what an unfortunate moment he had chosen, however innocently, to add another hoard-

ing, just when the populace had shown in no uncertain way how they felt about posters which disfigured their town. It was hinted also that many of the members of the new society might become customers of the new baker if he made a handsome gesture by removing it. But the baker pleaded that he had already contracted with the miller to let him the space for three years, and that therefore he had no power in the matter. The next move was to approach the miller whose flour the hoarding advertised. A most tactful letter was written to him by the secretary on the new official note-paper, on which was printed a list of the illustrious names of the general committee, which it was hoped would impress the recipient of our official correspondence. A most courteous man the miller proved to be. We wrote each other many polite letters, but nothing came of them except that a penetrating light was thrown on the mind of the British business man, and we were given our first insight into the difficulty of the task we had set ourselves. As I have not given the name of the miller nor any hint where he lives, I feel at liberty to print his final letter, as it does so completely sum up the point of view of hundreds and thousands of other manufacturers and business men, great and small. Although I give the whole of the letter, it is the last sentence of the last paragraph which contains the moral.

THE MILL,

DEAR SIR,

Thank you for your extremely courteous letter. I will call and see Mr. — the first time I am passing through Steyning. I have made a three years' agreement with him and in my opinion our posters are not unsightly and naturally it would be no gain to us to show them where they would not be seen.

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True; so far one up to the miller. The letter then continues:

I can quite understand you do not wish Steyning and the surrounding Downs to be spoilt by unsightly posters as I live in — myself and take particular notice of the beauty of the country. At the same time I cannot see that the poster is in a position that it would in any way affect the beauty of Steyning as it is placed before you actually get into the town on a spot which it improves the look of, in my opinion, being a blank wall.

Yours faithfully,

And there you have it in a nutshell!

A wall, because it is a blank wall, is improved by a poster! If that revealing expression of opinion by the miller came to me as a surprise, I was soon to learn that the miller was not alone in thinking that anything was better than a bare wall. I began at once to make inquiries. I spoke to several shopkeepers about bare walls and posters and found to my sorrow and surprise that most of them were of the same opinion as the miller. Before long the unpleasant but irrefutable fact emerged that to the majority, the overwhelming majority, of the population of this country a blank space is an object of abhorrence. And this includes blank spaces in the broadest sense. A nude wall is to them an ugly, indecent sight which needs a fig-leaf to hide it, if it is not to offend the eye, and the most natural fig-leaf is a brightly coloured poster, the larger the better. A bare stretch of the Downs is another indecency according to the Brighton Town Council, who as trustees for the public of a large area of the South Downs have felt it incumbent on them to authorize the construction of a motor-racing track to hide it. Roaring, stinking machines on the Downs will be bad enough, but still worse will be the scores of thousands of spectators in their thousands of motor-cars who will

converge on the chosen hillside and will leave behind them ton upon ton of paper litter which the south-west winds blowing up the Channel will scatter far and wide over the clean turf.

Bare walls, bare Downs, these unsightly objects will no longer offend the eye. To many of these haters of empty spaces the empty sky has long been a reproach. To them not only is the bareness offensive in itself; there is a financial side as well. To them all Nature is a potential source of money-making. One might have been forgiven for imagining that the heavens were above such mundane consideration, but not a bit of it. Not many years ago some vulgarians exploited the blue sky as a canvas on which to spell out in the dirty smoke of aeroplanes the names of some of the less reputable newspapers and other cheap commodities. Then another genius went one better, and with diabolical cunning invented a contrivance by which advertisements could be thrown at night on to the clouds, as on a screen, which could be—and would have to be—seen by myriads of human beings at one time over several counties. A fig for the blue sky by day and the dark clouds at night! But it is not only the bareness which offends the eye and which needs correcting, the ear too must be saved from tranquillity as well. Silence is another stupid old-fashioned peculiarity which the new urban-minded Englishman cannot abide. He must have noise, always and everywhere. Noise and a crowd are the twin necessities for his contentment. The urban dweller is afraid to be alone. When he leaves his home in the city to spend a day in the country he chooses a recognized "beauty spot," one vouched for by his daily newspaper. On arriving at the desired spot he parks his car in a row with other cars, and turns on his gramophone or portable wireless and he is happy. In the evening he returns home by the great main road in a spate of other cars, to spend the evening

listening to the blaring of his wireless. The rising and the risen generation requires three things, company, noise, and entertainment. The public fears silence almost as much as it does loneliness, and is restless and miserable without constant entertainment or distraction. The art of self-amusement has become almost a lost one, and this is very noticeable in children. There was a time, before cinemas and the wireless were invented, when children would amuse and entertain themselves. Boys and girls from the age of ten and upwards played games, made their own toys, and could be contented and happy for hours together. But, to judge from the school children of to-day, they do not know how to amuse themselves. They will sit with blank expressions on their faces waiting for somebody to come along and propose some amusement for them. I do not pretend to know what it is that has brought this change about unless it be the inventions I mentioned above, the motor-car, the wireless, and the cinema.

To run, or help to run, a small society such as ours for the preservation of the amenities of a small country town or village is indeed an education. It teaches how little some of us know about our neighbours, how completely foreign to ours is their point of view on many subjects. There is danger in it too, for before very long the would-be protector, or busybody, develops a highly critical sense. He becomes hypercritical and sees ugliness where he had never noticed it before. The protector of the amenities passes in his car through a village. Before taking on his self-imposed task he would have been aware perhaps of an ordinary English village, with no striking features about it, just a pleasant impression and no more. But the finished protector is for ever spoiled. Every hoarding or poster he sees causes his gall to rise, every "olde Tea Shoppe" raises his wrath. Sometimes I wish I had never had anything to

do with our society, for then I believe I should have been spared much bitterness. But it is too late now to go back, and the only alternative is to go on and as far as is possible persuade others to share the same views. If ever prevention was better than cure, it is in such work as is attempted by a local protection society. Once the fell deed is done it is very difficult indeed to get it rectified. Where such a society may hope to succeed is in preventing outrages before they are committed, to hear of them in time to take steps to check them.

Take, for example, the case of the electric light company. This wealthy and important company, with branches all over the county, purchased a very old and lovely building in the High Street of Steyning and turned it into offices, with a small show-room. Practically no external alterations were made at first and not much harm was done. But as the business increased, the premises were found to be too small and not adapted for the purpose, and the directors decided to pull down the old house and build another. Fortunately the society got wind of this, and at once wrote to the local manager to ask if the rumour was true that his company intended pulling down the old house with its Horsham-stone roof and build a new one. It was pointed out to him that the property was one-half of a beautiful old building which once had been a coaching inn, and that to destroy one-half of it would be a disaster, and also that a modern building in its place would spoil the whole appearance of one side of the street. With the letter we sent a photograph of the building and asked the manager if he would forward the photograph with our letter to his board of directors. To our relief a most courteous and sympathetic reply came back to say that it was indeed intended to build a new and more commodious building in place of the old, but that the directors of the company would carefully consider the question of building something which

would harmonize with its neighbours, and added that in any case nothing should be done without first consulting our society and hearing their views on the new plans which the company's architect was to draw. To cut short a long story, this enlightened company cancelled their original plan for building a conventional brick structure which would have ruined the appearance of the High Street, and their architect drew up another plan for a building as like as possible to the old one, and even arranged to replace the old Horsham-stone roof. I do not pretend we did not regret very much that the original building had to be altered at all, but it is useless to fight against all change and modernization, and we felt that here in any case our little society had accomplished something for the community, and also had proved that if the directors of a sound business concern are approached in time and in the proper spirit, often they will go out of their way to meet the wishes of the public, even when, as in this case, the change means an increase in expenditure.

I say "a sound company" with good reason. It is far easier to deal in cases of this sort with big companies than with the small man like the speculative builder. The latter is too often ignorant and stubborn and with little if any imagination, and no argument will appeal to him that relies only on a sense of beauty. His one idea of a property is to get as big a profit as he can on the capital he has laid out, and nothing else matters.

Another case of a big company doing the proper thing with their property was that of the local branch of a well-known bank. They had actually begun to pull down the front of a charming old Georgian house, to face it with plate-glass windows and roughcast, when frantic expostulations were made to the board of directors, with the result that they agreed to stop the work and to alter their plans entirely, ending by making a very pleasing

front to their office which harmonized with the houses on either side. Here again we were only just in time and had a broadminded and generous company to deal with.

So far our principal occupation has been to persuade the shopkeepers and others to remove unsightly posters and signs from their premises, and an uphill task it has been. There was Mrs. ——'s shop at the corner of Church Lane. It is not an old house, nor has it any claim to architectural beauty. But it stands in a prominent position jutting out in a street of very ancient houses. From pavement to roof the building was plastered with hideous signs, great and small. On counting them we found they totalled twenty-eight all told. On the instructions of the committee the chairman and the honorary secretary waited upon Mrs. —— to try to persuade her to remove, or let them remove, these advertisements. Her shop is one of those modest emporiums where nondescript merchandise is offered for sale, such as sweets, tobacco, cigarettes, small packets of tea, mustard and cocoa, boot polish, picture post cards, and meat extracts. With a view to ingratiating ourselves with the proprietress we opened the proceedings by demanding a popular brand of tobacco, the name of which was blazoned on one of the larger placards. Mrs. —— did not keep it, so we asked for another sort which was highly recommended on the outer walls. Again we met with disappointment, for she did not stock that either. We ended by asking what kinds of tobacco she did keep, and we each bought a packet of it as well as some cigarettes and picture post cards. Having by now, we thought, paved the way for the business in hand, we opened the subject of her unsightly hoardings by explaining in a few words the aims of the society which we represented. We inquired, with some diffidence, whether, if she agreed to the hoped-for

removal of her advertisements, she would be greatly out of pocket from the loss of the rents she received for exhibiting them. To our surprise we learned that she was paid for only one of them, a large and particularly vulgar advertisement, for which she received the sum of five shillings a year. For the other twenty-seven placards she received not one penny piece, which did not seem so unfair when we remembered that the shop did not stock most of the goods they advertised. The proprietress then stepped out of the shop on to the pavement to discuss with us the posters themselves. Some, it seemed, had come there by themselves in the night, like toad-stools. Nobody had asked permission to nail them up on the walls. In some cases Mrs. — had given leave for them to be put up; why, we could not fathom, for she was not paid anything for doing so, nor had she given any promise to sell the goods they advertised. When we asked her why she allowed large signs to be placed on her walls for nothing, she weakly admitted that when a traveller called and offered her a nice enamelled sign to put up and charged nothing for it, it seemed a pity not to take it. In fact, it was an example of that well-recognized weakness of human nature which makes us unable to resist the temptation of getting something for nothing.

At the conclusion of a series of such visits and talks we persuaded Mrs. — to allow the society to pull down most of her advertisements and agreed to pay her the five shillings a year for the three years she had contracted for with the one firm. In the place of this large one we had a dignified, beautifully painted sign made which gave all the information required about the shop, and put this up in its place. The result was that the street took on again almost the same appearance as it had one hundred years before. Several of the shopkeepers we approached were very accommodating, particularly the proprietor of the motor works, who agreed

to remove all the big enamelled signs, as did the principal baker in the town.

The aims of a small local preservation society should be the prevention and the cure of the minor horrors of the English countryside. It is useless for a small organization to attempt to tackle such major outrages as motor-racing tracks or vast building schemes on the Downs. It is better for them to go after smaller game where the odds are not too heavily against them. In the case of love it may be better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all, but in the case of preservation it is wisest not to try for anything unless there is a sporting chance of success. The principal minor horrors are unsightly advertisements and hoardings, litter, ravagers of wild flowers, and, perhaps the worst of the lot, the small speculative builder.

Many people think—and God knows they have good cause to think so—that England is the most poster-ridden country in Europe; but I am not at all certain that the fair land of France does not hold that unenviable place of honour. The thrifty Frenchman will sacrifice almost anything to make a few francs. Go where you will in France and observe—you cannot help but do so—the number of picturesque villages and towns which welcome you with a huge advertisement of one or other of their national *apéritifs*, those insipid tinctures which the French, although makers and drinkers of the best wines in the world, seem to require before a meal. How different are we and the French from the Germans and the Spaniards. Go up the Rhine in a paddle-steamer and not a hoarding is to be seen. There are picturesque spots in plenty, old castles and beetling precipices, all eligible sites crying out for monster advertisements which our own bill-posting companies would never allow to be so wasted. And in Spain, too, they are strict on this question of advertisements which dis-

figure the landscape. I do not know whether it is the laws of these two countries which prevent the exploitation of the beautiful by the ugly, or if it is simply an inborn sense of decency and love of the beautiful in the people themselves.

As to the litter which is scattered hither and thither, this is very difficult indeed to deal with. There are local laws to punish the miscreants, but they appear never to be enforced. Who ever heard of, or read in a newspaper an account of, the trial, conviction, and punishment of a litter-lout? I have been told by a friend who lived there for some while that the world's worst litter-leavers are to be found, of all countries, in Japan. This is the more surprising since the Japanese are a well-disciplined, law-abiding people, and also great lovers of the beautiful. They are also great ramblers, and like to go on outings in enormous parties larger even than the Germans. My friend went one day to visit a mountain near Beppu in the southern island, a place of national pilgrimage for the Japanese. When half-way up he overtook a large picnic party of two or three hundred Japanese boys and girls, all very well behaved and in the charge of several men, whom he took to be schoolmasters. On his way down the mountain an hour or two afterwards, at the place where the picnic had been, he saw more paper litter scattered about than he had ever seen before in one place. I asked him if he had ever visited the Brighton Downs after a race meeting at the Kempton race-course. He had not, so I advised him to do so before criticizing the Japanese.

Among the principal providers of ammunition for the litter-lout who despoils our country lanes and open spaces are the tricyclists who perambulate the country roads and lanes inviting the public to "stop them and buy one." The ices they offer for sale are supplied in cardboard cartons and cups, wrapped up in paper, and cardboard spoons are

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thoughtfully provided as well. I have sometimes picked these up to hide or bury in the ground and read on them a printed request to the customer to destroy or hide the package when empty—a request very seldom complied with.

CHAPTER VI

ALTHOUGH the choosing of a profession or calling for a boy about to leave school becomes each year more difficult, this entry into the wage-earning period of life is not nearly so difficult nor nearly so important as is the choice of the place and manner of retirement. How much thought and consideration is given to the former and how little to the latter! Some boys know what they want to do in life, which saves their parents and guardians a deal of worry, but such boys are rare. Generally when spoken to about his future career a boy assumes a blank expression and can offer no help at all. Some boys, in spite of a sound Public School education, have already made up their minds what they intend to become, but these are rare. They may be mathematically-minded or have a gift for music or art, or a flair for mechanics. If so, then there is something to go upon. But it is the average Public School boy who is the problem. Many of them have a vague ambition to become airmen or pilots, but this is generally due to having played in earlier days with toy aeroplanes and read innumerable boys' books in which the hero is an air-pilot who did spectacular and daring deeds in the air. For boys with little ambition and no vocation there is always the army to fall back upon. I do not mean by this to disparage the army as a serious profession for the serious-minded soldier; far from it, but the army certainly does provide for the mediocre and unambitious a secure job, with a certain if small remuneration and a pension at the end of service. It is the fashion for the "great and good" to place their sons for a year or two in a regiment of the Guards. This is done more for social reasons than for anything else, and it is

still quite the "thing to do." In any case, beyond developing rather grand ideas about how to live, it does little harm, and even the shortest term of service entitles the retired if juvenile officer to join the Guards' Club and to wear the coveted neck-tie. But for the young soldier who enters the army with ambitions, the Guards, I am told, makes the best university in the service.

Occasionally it happens that a schoolboy holds definite views about his future, but being the most reticent of beings he will not unburden himself to his elders. One such case happened in a family I know. Reggie, while still at Charterhouse, began to cause his parent some anxiety. Hitherto he had evinced no views as to his future career. To Reggie, as to most boys, each day was sufficient unto itself, and the future could go hang. As it was necessary for him to begin to earn his own living before long, a family council was held consisting of his widowed mother, elder brothers and sisters, and an uncle and aunt or two. Round the dining-room table the question of Reggie's career was thoroughly discussed. No one had any very sound advice to offer, and it began to look as if the family gathering would end in stalemate when an aunt made the bright suggestion that Reggie, the cause of all the bother, should be called into the room and interrogated. Reggie was duly brought in, and the eldest brother delivered a grave lecture on the seriousness of the situation and warned him of the melancholy future in store for him if he did not soon choose a profession and settle down to it. At the conclusion of the lecture one of the aunts broke in to ask Reggie if there was any particular calling he would like to follow, to which Reggie replied, without a moment's hesitation, "Yes, I want to be an average adjuster." This reply completely took the wind out of the sails of the assembly, for not one of them had ever heard of an average adjuster, nor had the most remote conception what an

average adjuster was or did. The explanation of Reggie's choice came out later when it was learnt that the father of Reggie's best friend at school was a member of that exclusive and mysterious profession. Actually Reggie became an actor.

There is a certain type of boy who is better sent from his Public School to a foreign university than to Oxford or Cambridge. By going to a good Continental university he will at least learn to speak French or German fluently. And there are good universities in the colonies and the United States of America where an English Public School boy of the narrow, conventional type of mind will learn a great deal which will be useful to him in future life, particularly if he is going to enter on a business career. Some of the universities in the United States offer diplomas in subjects in which our English universities sadly lag behind. At some of these a young man, or young woman, can take a diploma in such original and varied subjects as weather forecasting, philately, salesmanship, bone-setting, plumbing, window-dressing, hospitality, and pedagogy, while Chicago University offers a degree in sausage-making, but only, I believe, at the Wisconsin State University can an undergraduate study for a degree in cheese-making and swine husbandry. Our older universities can offer nothing to compare with these, but Birmingham does grant a degree in brewing and Manchester a B.C.C.—Bachelor of Colour Chemistry.

I do not pretend to understand boys. People speak of the "modern boy" as if he were an animal of quite a different species from the boy of the days when they themselves were boys. Probably it is we grown-ups who have changed and the boy of to-day is just the same as before but living in altered surroundings. But in one way the modern boy is an improvement on the old; he is not cruel. At least all the boys I know do not seem to be cruel, either

to animals or to other boys. Bullying, as I knew it when I was at a Public School, seems no longer to exist.

I shudder when I look back at the things my boy friends and I used to do. At Dunster, in Somersetshire, where we used to spend our holidays, one of my particular cronies was the son of the village butcher, another was the son of the proprietor of the Luttrell Arms. Our happiest childhood hours were spent at the slaughter-house, cutting the throats of sheep and pigs. All three of us became very dexterous at this and at skinning and disembowelling domestic animals. And yet I do not believe I was any more cruel than other normal healthy boys of my age. I remember very well my pride when one day the butcher allowed me to kill a bullock all by myself. The poor terrified brute had a rope put round its neck, which was passed through a hole in a block of wood. When the rope was in place my friends tugged on it until the head of the beast rested on the block. Then I seized the executioner's pole-axe by its long wooden handle and with one unerring blow brought the point of the pole-axe on the middle of the bullock's forehead, driving the iron point through its skull into its brain. The beast quivered for a moment and then fell dead in a relaxed heap. We boys looked upon those summer days spent at the slaughter-house as well spent and suffered no qualms whatever.

My father used to hire a pony for me to ride, at first a stocky little Exmoor pony, and, as I grew to be a better rider, a bigger one called Black Horner. Of course I always followed the hounds whenever they met in the neighbourhood—the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, the West Somerset Foxhounds, and the Harriers. Although mounted only on a pony, I was able, owing to my knowledge of the country, to keep up quite well. One glorious day I was in at the death of a stag; it was brought to bay in a stream in a coombe near Cloutsham. After the stag had had its

throat cut I was initiated into the brotherhood of stag-hunters by being blooded. I was so proud of the blood-stains on my face that it was only after a tremendous family row that I consented to have the dried blood of the stag washed off. I wanted to go to bed as I was, in order to be able to "show off" next day to the village boys. I do not hunt now, but I hear that this crude relic of barbarity still goes on.

I wonder if I have deteriorated, turned soft and sentimental with age, for there are scores of men, and women too, better than I, who see nothing repulsive in these blood rites. Nowadays nothing short of dire necessity would drive me to kill a pig, a sheep, or a bullock, nor indeed do I really find any genuine pleasure in killing animals or birds by sporting means. I have a theory that the boys of my own generation were living links with the dim past, that they were, at the age of, say, twelve to fifteen, in the same state of civilization or human development in which the adult European was some thousand years ago. The modern boy has, I maintain, advanced on my generation about five hundred years, but he is still a link with the past.

Professor Zinsser, in his "Rats, Lice, and History," has a good deal to say on this subject, but goes farther than I do, and quotes a distinguished biologist who recently claimed, on the basis of anatomical and physiological studies, that there is a much closer similarity between man and the young, rapidly developing anthropoid than there is between man and the adult ape. According to this theory, Professor Zinsser maintains that we may be looked upon as arrested or maladjusted apes; while the apes, passing through this stage, go on to adulthood, where they cease to struggle for the things they cannot achieve and arrive at reasonable contentment. This is in keeping with Goethe's view that man is a permanent adolescent.

For those of us with children to educate, the question of

how and where this should be done has, these last few years, become more difficult. Should a girl be sent to a boarding school, or should she be educated at home by an intelligent governess, Swiss for preference, so that she will grow up into a young woman able to speak French fluently, have more than a smattering of botany and the arts, and be able to walk across a drawing-room without knocking the ornaments off the tables? As to our boys, many parents are in grave doubt whether the Public School gives the best education available. This in part depends upon the boy. Some boys are born to be sound Public School boys; others never really fit in at one or are really happy. It is these latter who are the difficulty, and are all the greater responsibility because they are often the boys with the best brains and, if educated on the proper lines, turn out the best men.

Schools for the sons of officers, gentlemen, and clergymen must pay very well, particularly the costly preparatory schools for boys. The fees are enormous, the terms short, and the holidays long. Given the slightest excuse, the head master of one of these select academies will proclaim to his delighted pupils an extra week's holiday. Not a word to the parents to inquire if it is convenient for them to receive home their offspring a week earlier than they expected. No letter comes from the school to explain the reason for this sudden alteration in dates, still less is a cheque sent to refund the parent for the loss he will incur from the breaking of the contract to educate, lodge, and board his child for a specified period. Sometimes, when the excuse for the extra holiday is disclosed, the parents can hardly be blamed if they consider it inadequate. For example, a friend of mine sent his three sons to a good but expensive preparatory school. The head master and proprietor was a clergyman, all the assistant masters were old Oxford or Cambridge blues, so naturally

the fees were high. One day in November my friend and his wife received a letter from the head master to inform them that the boys were to be granted a whole week's holiday in the middle of the term, in celebration of the forthcoming marriage of the matron to the drawing-master, and a postscript was added to say that each boy would be expected to subscribe ten shillings towards a suitable wedding gift! At one of our more famous Public Schools an extra week added to the usual eight weeks' summer holiday has become the recognized thing. Sometimes it is granted in honour of some boy who had won a scholarship at Oxford or Cambridge, at others to signify the school's debt to an old boy who had gained a blue for athletic prowess at the same seats of learning, less often it is conceded to a past pupil who has won the sword of honour at a military academy. But at last the worms—the enraged parents—turned and, driven to exasperation, protested so loudly and in such strong terms that the annual extra leave has since been dropped. The cause of this mutiny, the straw which eventually broke the camel's back, was the granting to the school, in the summer of 1933, of an extra seven days' holiday because the Earl of Derby's horse had won the Derby!

The proprietors of the popular schools must do very well indeed out of these extra holiday ramps, for in addition to the feeling of popularity which they win so cheaply, they must pocket quite a tidy sum in hard cash. Suppose that the school has six hundred pupils, whom it costs one pound a week a head to feed, wash, warm, and cook for, that leaves the owners of the school with a clear profit of £600. No wonder that the waiting lists of our more exclusive Public Schools grow shorter year by year, and that more parents prefer to send their sons to grammar schools where the education is generally first class and the fees trivial in comparison to those of the Public Schools.

Another mystery to me is why the scholars are sent home when any epidemic breaks out in the school. To the ordinary mind the right and obvious thing to do when a school full of boys or girls has become a hotbed of contagious or infectious disease would be to keep the children isolated from the rest of the population until the sickness had worn itself out. But at some schools, when measles, scarlet fever, or even such a grave disease as meningitis or infantile paralysis has broken out, the pupils are sent to their homes, although liable to spread the contagion far and wide.

I was one of those boys who did not fit in at a Public School. I was unhappy, but this was partly my own fault for being idle. For two years I sat at the bottom place in the bottom form of the classical side, and have little doubt that I should have continued to sit there if one day the head master had not come into the classroom and, after a whispered conversation with the form-master, proclaimed in a loud voice, "Gosse, you are idle and lazy. If I find that you are amongst the three lowest places at the end of next week I shall flog you!" This threat put the very fear of death into me. I toiled, ceased to play pranks in class, wasted no moment of "prep." at desk-cricket or wood-carving, and when the "Beak" returned at the end of the following week I was top of the form. I had badly overdone it, and although each week after that I sunk down a place or two, I made enough marks on the aggregate to get a move up, my last one, into the next form.

At my preparatory school I had been very happy. It was a very good day school in Orme Square, Bayswater, run by one of the best of men and best of schoolmasters, Herbert Wilkinson. There was no bullying there to speak about. Although most of my time I was at the bottom of the school, I shared that humble position with a dear friend called Henry. He is now a learned and beloved physician practising his profession on Campden Hill. At the end of

the first term examinations were held, but as these were far beyond the scope of Henry and me, a special and very simple test of knowledge was arranged for us. In the middle of the large schoolroom stood a blackboard, within a square formed by the desks of the bigger and more advanced pupils. The special examination for Henry and me was held by the head master, who wrote some simple words on the blackboard, which we were to read aloud. Fortunately I forget how I myself did, but I remember very vividly, as if it all happened yesterday, how little Henry got on. First the head master wrote down a word which Henry could make nothing of. Then he tried another and yet another, but all in vain. He was a kind, patient man who wished to help the backward boy, so at last he said, "Now, Henry, I am going to write on the blackboard the name of something you are very fond of, and if you read it correctly I will give you some to take home with you." Henry, a minute boy with a huge head and a solemn rather learned expression, brightened up appreciably on hearing this. Then the head master, taking in his hand a fresh piece of chalk, slowly spelled out in bold, clear capitals the word CHOCOLATE.

A deathly hush fell over the room, while little Henry, with head slightly on one side and with wrinkled brow, studied the word. The excitement among the onlookers grew intense, and if will power could have penetrated Henry's big head, he would quickly have won the prize. Still we waited; still Henry puckered his brow and stared at the tantalizing letters. Then all of a sudden it was seen that something was at work in Henry's mind, and a moment later, in a high, piping voice, in which could be detected the recklessness of the gambler who risks all on a throw of the dice or the turn of a card, little Henry piped out "SAUSAGES!"

Haileybury I found very different from the Orme Square school. When I went there I was not only the smallest

but the youngest boy in the school, and my first term or two were one drawn-out spell of misery. Looking back now at it all, I can remember only two masters who appeared to take any interest at all in the smaller boys, except during classes or on the playing fields. At other times than these we were left entirely to our own devices. Nowadays I believe the tendency is in the opposite direction, and the practice of schoolmasters, particularly at private schools, is to act on the assumption that every boy if left to himself for an hour is bound to be up to some mischief or worse, and therefore every waking hour, in school hours or out, must be accounted for and some supervised occupation provided. I have often tried to find out from boys at Public Schools whether much bullying goes on now, and as far as I can gather there is none or very little. I say "gather" because the modern schoolboy is the most reticent of beings when asked any questions about his school life. There seems to be a spirit of freemasonry amongst them, for if you make the most innocent inquiry about a boy's work, games, friends, or indeed, anything whatever to do with his school life, he immediately shuts up like an oyster.

When I was at Haileybury only the boys of the upper school had a study or the share of one. The lower boys had the choice of spending their time in their classrooms or in a room which was attached to each dormitory. Every house consisted of a dormitory with forty to fifty cubicles. Each cubicle contained a bedstead, a chest of drawers, a chair, and the boy's play-box and personal treasures. The dormitories were strictly out of bounds from the time we dressed in the morning until bedtime. At first I spent the winter afternoons and evenings in my classroom. I was in the Shell, the lowest form on the classical side. This room seems to me now to have been occupied by fiends rather than by human beings, whose principal joy was to torment me and another small boy

called Storrs. It was the custom on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for the boys to cook their own high tea—or supper—there. Sumptuous meals were prepared by—or more often for—the boys who had most pocket-money to spend on sausages, eggs, bacon, and other delicacies at the school “grub shop.” As there was not space on the coal fire for all the saucepans and frying-pans, the unprotected gas-jets which hung down from the ceiling were used as well. How vividly I recall the agonizing pain in my arms as I stood for what seemed hours on top of a desk holding at arm’s length above my head a tin saucepan over one of those gas-jets. A saucepan full of water is a heavy object when held above the head. Soon one’s arm began to ache so much that the saucepan had quickly to be changed from one hand to the other while the aching arm was rested, and then changed back again. According to the cookery books it takes just four minutes to boil an egg, but those school eggs I used to boil for bigger boys I will swear took half an hour. Meanwhile the slave-driver would stand by with a cane or a wire toasting-fork, and if the saucepan was not held well and truly over the gas-jet down came the weapon on your miserable back.

But there was a worse torture even than egg-boiling. Our form-room was at the top of the building and had a steep flight of stone steps leading up to it. Inside the room the roof of this stairway ran obliquely along one side of the room up to the ceiling. This wasted space had been converted into a cupboard, and there was a door at one end. The floor of this cupboard was formed by the roof of the staircase, and rose steeply to join the ceiling at the farther end. When the door of the cupboard was shut it was pitch-dark inside. To punish the smallest offence against the ruthless laws of the “Shell,” or merely to make a Roman holiday, we small boys were condemned to be “smoked” in what was termed the “Black Hole of Calcutta.” After

one or more wretched victims had been flung into the cupboard, the door was shut on us and we lay huddled together in pitch darkness for the fun to begin. We did not have long to wait. At the bottom of the door there was a hole and presently through this, thick choking smoke of smouldering blotting-paper would begin to ooze and we would all begin to cough. If there were several of us in the cupboard we could not sit or lie down, and soon a panic would break out. Terrified children, with eyes streaming, gasping for breath, suffocated by the heavy fumes, would begin to struggle and fight for breath. Occasionally the joke was carried too far, and when the door was opened and the dense smoke had cleared, several small unconscious bodies would be lifted out, to be resuscitated by their scared tormentors.

It will not seem surprising if, after a spell of this sort of thing, I made up my mind to leave the "Shell" and seek peace, warmth, and quiet in the dormitory room. This room was occupied by somewhat older boys, and it was not usual for the small boys to enter it except to fag. Timidly I entered this room for the first time, hoping that I might be told to make toast, or boil a kettle, or fry a saucepan on the fire, which I meant to do as well as ever I could, so that I might at last be left alone in peace. My hopes were not realized. Although there was no Black Hole of Calcutta in the dormitory room, its settled inmates were not lacking in other ingenious methods of baiting small boys. I stood it all as long as I could, for there was no other place to go. Oddly enough it was not a piece of physical but mental bullying that eventually drove me out into the cold quadrangle. One night the head boy of the gang proposed that a concert should be held. For a stage a blackboard was laid across two desks on which the performers stood. Two or three of the bigger boys stood up in turn and sang a comic song, and from my corner well out of view I much

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enjoyed the show. But suddenly, to my horror, the leading boy called upon me for a song. Being extremely shy and knowing no songs, I begged to be let off. But without more ado I was hoisted up on the blackboard and told to sing a comic song. No professional comedian who has hurried from the bedside of his dying child to amuse an audience ever felt less fitted to sing a funny song than I did on that occasion. But there was no escaping, so when the chief bully ordered me to sing the then popular music hall ditty, "The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo," I began in a high tremulous voice:

As I stroll along the Bois de Boulogne,
With an independent air,
You can hear the girls declare,
"He must be a millionaire."
You should hear them sigh
And wish to die,
You should see them wink the other eye
At the Man who broke——

but the song was never finished. In a flood of tears I leaped from the platform and made my escape down the stairs into the dark quadrangle. Now I had nowhere I dared to go, and as it was a cold winter's night and raining, I ran round and round the big square until too tired to go on, when I went and sat in one of the outdoor earth closets until the bell sounded for chapel. Chapel and bed were the only two places where peace and warmth were to be found.

After the first term or two life became more bearable. One had learned what to do and what not to do, and there were new boys whose initiation engaged most of the tyrants' attention. It was unfortunate for me that I was sent to school in the autumn term. The days grew shorter and before dusk the gates of the quadrangle were locked up. In the spring and summer one was able to go alone, or with

a friend, to amuse oneself apart from the crowd, outside the school buildings. It was in the following spring I made an unexpected friend, a man to whom I owe a very great deal. The older I grow the more do I appreciate my debt. This unlooked-for friend was none other than my house-master Mr. Headley, a man quite unlike all the other masters. I believe now that he was far from being happy in his chosen profession. I do not believe that boys as boys interested him very much, either in the classroom or on the playing fields. He much preferred birds to boys, and who is to blame him? If, as I suspect, he disliked teaching boys, what a tragedy his life must have been. I do not know how he found out that a certain small, red-haired, freckled boy in his house was fond of animals, but he may have seen in his cubicle a redpole in a cage which had been taught to haul up its drinking water by a string, at the other end of which was a bucket made from a thimble, or a case of grass snakes, or a cage of white mice may have given him the hint. Anyhow my life at Haileybury became altogether changed afterwards. On Sunday afternoons he sometimes took me with him to search for birds' nests, though butterflies, field mice, beetles, all caught his trained eye, and as we roamed about he used to tell me their names and about their habits. My bearded grown-up friend had revealed to me a new and marvellous world. On these occasions there was no trace of the pedagogue and the pupil. On the contrary, he behaved to me as one naturalist behaves to another when both are engaged in their favourite pursuit.

I think he must have guessed that I was unhappy and that I was afraid to spend the evenings in the form-room with the other boys, for he invited me to help him to sort, classify, and arrange the school natural history collection. This was housed in a small room in one of the buildings outside the school itself, and I used to feel very important as he and

I went off to the museum together after late tea. Amongst the boys he bore the odd nickname of "the Dog," though why, I never fathomed. The boys liked him, partly I think because he did not aim at popularity and partly because he did not make those silly jokes in class, like some judges do in court, and many colonels in mess, which, although they are received with peals of sycophantic laughter, are secretly looked upon with contempt. He kept good discipline, both in his classroom and in his house, not by threats or punishment, but because he treated the boys fairly and trusted them to behave well.

I am not sure that I really was quite the dunce I was supposed to be, and that my backwardness was not mainly due to the large classes of thirty or more boys. The brighter boys sat in the front benches directly under the eye of the form-master, while the dregs of the class sat on the back benches, where they could scarcely be seen. Occasionally I was caned for being at the bottom, and then by judicious cribbing and help from my neighbours I would go up a few places, gaining temporary relief. Our form-master, Mr. Burgess, "the Bargee," was a master quite of the old school. He was very tall, bald, and grim, with an enormous moustache and bushy eyebrows. I think he hated the whole lot of us, and really I cannot blame him. He showed no liking for any of us and certainly no favouritism, for he flogged us all impartially. I was very frightened of him, so that whenever my turn came to answer a question or stand up to recite or translate I was struck dumb with terror, which he mistook for ignorance, and he would order me to go to his study after chapel. We all knew well enough that such an invitation was not to take supper with him. I remember my first such visit; it proved to be the first of many, when with lagging feet and heavy heart I climbed the steep stairs to his room and timidly tapped at his door. He was out, so I entered to wait for him, and being of an inquiring mind

I wandered about the room examining his belongings. Having no doubts as to the object of my visit, I was not reassured when I saw several silver cups on his mantelpiece which he had won, according to the inscriptions on them, for feats of strength, such as putting the weight and throwing the hammer. I was soon to have conclusive proof that the reputation "the Bargee" had for being the hardest caner in the school was justified, at all events his canings hurt me more than those of any other master who flogged me. I think I was caned at least once by every master I came in contact with. Even my friend Mr. Headley was on one occasion driven to inflict corporal punishment on his fellow-naturalist, but immediately the unpleasant business was over we forgave and forgot, as we sorted out a newly arrived box of bird skins. Only once was I birched. This curious sadistic rite was performed only by the head master, and so seldom as to give the victim a certain glamour amongst his fellows. My heinous crime was smoking, a filthy habit I still indulge in. A birching always took place in the library in the evening. With trousers down the victim was hung on to the broad back of Stone, the college porter. It was as painful as well as an undignified performance; worse than most canings. I was sentenced to receive twelve strokes with the birch. The pain of the first half-dozen was excruciating, but after that the skin became numbed and the remaining blows did not hurt much. What did hurt, though, was when I extracted the ends of the twigs which had broken off and become firmly embedded in the skin of my right buttock and thigh. It was the custom when the victim had pulled up his trousers and was in a fit state to leave to present the porter with half a crown, in exchange for which he received a nosegay of birch twigs, which was proudly worn in the button-hole. The bewitched then walked—rather lamely—across the quadrangle to the great hall where four hundred boys were doing

their preparation. It was a nervous moment when you opened the door and entered. Every one of the four hundred boys would look up from his books, and as you walked up the whole length of the hall to report to the master in charge who sat at a table on a raised dais at the other end, they all shuffled their feet and tapped with their pencils as a mark of respect and admiration.

I am still uncertain whether caning in moderation is not a better punishment for naughty boys than being "kept in" after school hours to write impositions. Certainly the latter is better than unlimited and severe floggings. If a boy is continually given corporal punishment he is in great danger of becoming a moral and physical coward. With practice the writing of impositions became a skilled craft. Adepts were able to scribble a hundred or two lines at an incredible speed. My own handwriting was irrevocably ruined by writing impositions. Some ingenious boys taught themselves to write with two pens in the hand at once. One artist in the lower third could write with three pens at once, but I think he was the only boy who reached such a pitch of proficiency. Quite a trade was done in lines, and there used to be regular fixed prices for them. There were always boys to be found who would write another boy's lines for him for payment of a small sum or in exchange for a pot of jam or a fives ball, or some other commodity. There were also the professional writers of lines who spent a large part of the time when they should have been out of doors or else doing their preparation writing thousands of lines ready to sell to the highest bidder.

A favourite trick of one of the bolder characters was to take a master the lines he had written for him and then to hang about outside the master's quarters. When the master came out the boy would run quickly upstairs, enter the master's room and retrieve his lines from the waste-paper

basket, which he would smooth out with a hot iron to use again. On the whole, we were an unpleasant lot of boys.

Not far from the school another boy and I discovered one October day, during a walk, a nut garden. A notice on the gate informed the public that for the sum of sixpence anyone might pick as many nuts as he could carry away in his pockets, but no sacks, bags, or baskets were allowed. I had returned to school that term with a new heavy overcoat, a good deal too big and too long for me, because I had at last started to grow. My friend and I with a knife slit the bottom of both the side pockets of my new coat and, presenting ourselves at the cottage of the woman who owned the nut grove, we each paid our sixpence and were admitted. We soon got to work picking filberts as rapidly as ever we could, putting them into my side pockets, whence they fell into the lining of the skirt of the coat. By the time the coat could hold no more we must have picked several bushels of nuts and I could hardly stagger out with the weight. Once out of sight of the cottage I took off the coat, which my fellow-marauder and I carried like a sack between us until we got back to the school, where we concealed our plunder in a safe place.

One very favourite master was Mr. Kennedy. He used to give magic-lantern lectures about all sorts of things, which were very popular. On the day I went to be caned by him I was delighted to find his study table propped up with one leg on the back of a live armadillo. I had never seen an armadillo before, still less one with a table leg on it. I hoped by showing an intelligent interest, and a perfectly genuine one, in the armadillo that perhaps Mr. Kennedy might forget or overlook the misunderstanding which had brought about my visit. All such hope was in vain. As soon as the whipping was over the master lifted the table leg off the armadillo, which nimbly shuffled round the

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room like some gigantic wood-louse. It seemed that Mr. Kennedy made a practice of putting the leg of the table on the armadillo when he wanted to prevent it from wandering about. Afterwards he used to invite me to tea with the armadillo, and we all three became very good friends.

CHAPTER VII

Do those who dwell year after year beneath the shadow of some conspicuous and lofty eminence become influenced by its unceasing presence? I think there is no doubt of it, though it is difficult to define exactly wherein the spell lies, or to analyse the physiological effect of being continually under the eye, as it were, of a guardian spirit. High above Crossbows stands Chanctonbury, the monarch of the South Downs. There it stands and there it has stood for a thousand centuries and more, watching men come and men go, but itself never changing. Countless millions of men have gazed up at Chanctonbury from time immemorial, have fought and died to win it and fought and died to hold it. No wonder that our primeval forefathers chose Chanctonbury for their pagan god to give ear to their prayers. To anyone who has lived close to it there is nothing fantastic or grotesque about this. The great hill was once a guiding beacon for the benighted wanderer, when the Weald was one vast marshy forest of oak, and it is still a friend to welcome home the returned traveller—a friend which never fails and never changes in a changing world.

On a moonlight night when you open the window of your bedroom to see what sort of a night it is, there high up above stands the great sombre hill, silent and asleep, its contour silhouetted against the star-bespattered heavens. At dawn the scene is altered. As the rim of the sun tops the distant trees in the east, its rays suddenly illuminate the Ring itself, the group of giant weather-beaten beeches which grow on its summit. Quickly, as the sun climbs higher in the paling sky, the light drives the night shadows down the steep side of the Downs until the whole hill is bathed in

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light and streaked by long shadows of the small trees, beech and yew, which are scattered here and there. And so the changes are rung, from before dawn until the sun sinks again far away in the west, when the shadows reappear and lengthen, now pointing towards the east, and the hill fades slowly away. Sometimes on days when the sun is high in the heavens and a strong wind blows, scurrying clouds cast small shadows which pursue one another, gliding silently and swiftly along the Downs. On other days, when the gale blows up from the north-east, ivory-white gulls beat their way slowly and laboriously against it, to reach the sheltered tidal feeding ground of Bramber Water. It is not only on fine days that Chanctonbury is wonderful. On a stormy winter's day when fierce gales come blustering and roaring up the Channel it is magnificent, and in rain also, and in mist. So it is when the white sea fog, which from below looks like fleece, rolls silently and remorselessly up from the Channel across the Downs, until it reaches the crest and encounters the Ring and passes through its leafless trees like bleached wool through a carding comb. The advancing cloud goes silently on to pour down the steep side of the hill until it reaches and envelops the line of tall Scotch firs which form our boundary. On rare days we may get no sight of the hill at all as it stands hidden from view in an impenetrable blanket of cloud, then suddenly a break appears and for a moment or two our venerable friend can be seen.

Naturally the Ring is haunted. Even on bright summer days there is an uncanny sense of some unseen presence, which seems to follow you about. If you enter the dark wood alone you are conscious of Something behind you. When you stop, It stops; when you go on, It follows. However swiftly you turn round to look behind, you are not quite quick enough to catch sight of It, whatever It is. If you stand stock-still and listen, even on the most tranquil

day when no breath of air stirs the leaves, you can hear a whispering somewhere above you. No birds live in this sombre wood but a single pair of yaffles, and occasionally the silence is broken by a loud, mocking laugh.

Only once have we been so bold as to enter the Ring on a dark night. My wife and I went there alone. We never shall repeat the visit. Some things are best forgotten if they can be, and certainly not set down in a book.

We often have asked ourselves at what season of the year, in what sort of weather, Chanctonbury looks loveliest, and the question will never be answered. On a winter day, after one of our rare falls of snow, it is very beautiful in its mantle of virgin white, dotted here and there by coal-black yew trees, against a background of pale blue sky. On hot, blazing days, when there is no breath of wind off the sea, it stands majestically in an aroma of wild thyme amidst the drone of bees and the shrill of crickets. On a brave November day it is unsurpassable. The golden leaves are yet on the beech trees, and when they are still wet with the heavy autumn dew, their gold is shining and iridescent. The next gale will bring down the leaves to form a carpet of burnished copper, while here and there will be long golden streaks on the ground where the wind has swept the leaves into lines. At this time of the year there is a peculiar softness of the atmosphere. Distant prospects when looked at from the Ring have a blue haziness, like the blue smoke of burning autumn leaves. As the eye gazes away towards the ridge of the North Downs, they look remote and mysterious. Behind us there lies spread out a panorama of rolling downland, with Cissbury Camp rising up beyond it and the English Channel, calm and misty, beyond the camp. Directly beneath our feet to the north is a vast amphitheatre, steep-sided with hanging woods of beech, with a few ash trees. Here and there are sheltered hollows, so sheltered that when the prevailing

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south-west gales blow not a leaf stirs. In these hollows flocks of early swallows and martins congregate in hundreds when they first come back in May after their long absence. As we scramble down the precipitous hillside we get now and again an exquisite peep of the Weald below, through picture frames formed of the branches of trees. The valley of the winding Bramber Water is hidden by white mist, which looks just like an estuary of the sea. Here and there a single tree or a small wood stands up above the mist like an island. Beyond, on the other side of the estuary, are more downs looking for all the world like the coast of some strange unknown land. The group of giant beech trees which form the Ring on Chanctonbury, and which is such a prominent landmark for miles around, did not always stand where it does to-day. In the dim past the hill was a stronghold, and whoever held Chanctonbury was overlord of all he surveyed. No band of robbers, no mob of hostile neighbours, no invading horde of Danes or Norsemen could move anywhere in the plain below without being discovered by the sentinels who kept watch from the ramparts of Chanctonbury. When the Romans came they were not slow to recognize the importance of such a site, for they seized it and strengthened its fortifications. They built a temple there on the summit and we often pick up Roman coins as well as pieces of broken pottery and Roman bricks. The Ring which is now the most famous landmark on the whole of the South Downs is the result of an act of blatant vandalism committed one hundred and seventy-five years ago by a man who loved the Downs as well as or more than any other. This was Squire Charles Goring, of Monkton Park, which stands immediately below the hill. This great house was rebuilt in 1585 by a Tudor financier and speculator, and there his three sons, who all became famous men, were born. The lustre which this triumvirate of Elizabethan heroes gave to Monkton Park

has never been repeated or approached since. As to the great house which Sir Thomas, the elder, built, the restorers of the last century did all in their power to spoil it, as they did the old church which stands beside it in the park. Squire Goring was proud of his vast estate, as well he might be, but of all his property he loved best Chanctonbury Hill.

To modern ideas it was a wicked thing to plant trees on so venerable and sacred a spot, where trees had never grown before and where trees were never meant to grow. But such is the effect of time, sentiment, and habitude that if the present owner of Chanctonbury threatened to cut down the Ring which his ancestor planted a national outcry would be raised. Every society in England which exists to preserve our national historical monuments or natural beauties, or stands for public decency, every society which at this late hour strives to save what is left worth while preserving, would be up in arms to spare the Ring from the woodman's axe. The public indignation at such an outrage would be far greater than that which is raised when destruction is threatened to an old windmill. Yet when these unsightly, misshapen engines were first introduced into England and were stuck up on every hill-top, they must have ruined many a fair prospect. True, no one appears to have protested at this foreign invasion of the English country scene, but in those days even fewer Englishmen seem to have appreciated the beauties of the countryside than they do now, or else they took them for granted, and in any case he would have been a rash tenant who dared to criticize the action of the powerful lord of the manor. And now these same windmills have become beautiful and interesting from long association, and everything is done to keep in repair the few which remain—not to grind English corn grown by English farmers, but purely to preserve as monuments of the past objects which have come to be regarded as things of rural beauty. And so the world goes on—that

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which was an eye-sore yesterday is become lovely to-day, and the spectre of to-day may become a precious treasure to-morrow. Years hence some garden city on the Cotswold Hills will protect behind iron railings an "olde English petrol pumpe," or archæologists will attempt to reconstruct a unique and interesting Elizabethan hamlet in Sussex called Peacehaven. Fortunately there is no immediate danger threatening the Ring, and there will be none so long as it remains in the hands of its present owner, who values his trust. No landlord could be more jealous to preserve intact the inheritance which has been handed down to him by his forefathers.

In the year 1760 no one apparently cared very much one way or the other what a landlord did with his own property. How different from to-day when the lot of a landed proprietor is indeed no sinecure, but is the concern of every tax collector and Government official! Certainly there is no record of any protest being raised when the seventeen-year-old squire of Monkton climbed up to the top of Chanctonbury Hill to supervise his labourers as they dug holes in the floor of the Roman temple to plant scores of beech saplings. This lord of the Manor of Monkton, Mr. Charles Goring, was a remarkable man. In the year 1828, when he had reached the venerable age of eighty-five, he made an excursion up to the plantation which he had planted sixty-eight years before, and was so moved by the occasion that he sat down and wrote these verses to commemorate the crowning event of his long life.

How oft around thy Ring, sweet Hill,
A Boy, I used to play,
And form my plans to plant thy top
On some auspicious day.
How oft among thy broken turf
With what delight I trod.
With what delight I placed those twigs
Beneath thy maiden sod.

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And then an almost hopeless wish
Would creep within my breast,
Oh! could I live to see thy top
In all its beauty dress'd.
That time's arrived; I've had my wish,
And lived to eighty-five;
I'll thank my God who gave such grace
As long as e'er I live.
Still when the morning Sun in Spring,
Whilst I enjoy my sight,
Shall gild thy new-clothed Beech and sides,
I'll view thee with delight.

It is disturbing to reflect how frail are the bulwarks which protect the few remaining wild tracts of Sussex from the wreckers. In the case of the great triangle of down which is bounded by Chanctonbury, Findon, and Cissbury, much of it is in the ownership of one young man. Fortunate this is, for it could not be in safer private hands. But life is as precarious as increasing taxes are certain, and sooner or later taxes and death duties must bring about the dissolution of every big estate in this country, and then the worst will happen, unless the State steps in to save instead of to destroy. As matters stand at present, nothing would induce a Government to purchase and keep intact a tract of virgin England except very strong public opinion. It would prefer, in the good old English way, to leave the few and the generous to come to the rescue and buy for the nation what the nation does not appreciate or want. The few bare acres of the South of England which remain should be made safe for all time by being purchased from their present owners for a fair and generous sum, to become the property of the nation and be placed in trust for the generations to follow. Otherwise, when a landowner—and I speak of good landowners—is faced with no alternative but to part with his land, what will happen? There will be a public auction to which human vultures will come and

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gather round the corpse ; land speculators, company promoters, speculative builders, and all the other riff-raff to whom the country means nothing else than something out of which money can be made by "development," which means cutting down fine trees and cutting up the land into little "lots" and erecting on each a bungalow, a garage, and a chicken run. Or else—but perish the thought!—this lovely stretch of the Sussex Downs might fall into the tender care of the Brighton Town Council, in which case who would dare hazard to what indignities it might not be exposed? That gathering of the guardians of the public's rights might decide to construct another motor-racing track, or perhaps a zoological garden with dance halls, tea-gardens, bandstands, swings, and swimming pools for the rowdy enjoyment of a Brighton holiday crowd, or they might, with a plausible desire to keep up with the times, turn it into a nudist fun park. The thought is dreadful to contemplate, but the danger is always present with Brighton not so many miles away. But why abuse the Town Council of Brighton? Are they not the honest representatives of the citizens of Brighton? Are they not the elected mouth-pieces of the ratepayers and the voters of the Blackpool of the South? Are they not carrying out to the best of their abilities the wishes of their constituents when they sacrifice the Downs which have been put into their trust to make a Brighton bank holiday?

In the opinion of the Great British Public any bare tract of land is odious and wasted unless it can be put to some utilitarian purpose, such as a planned and regulated pleasure ground. Quiet too it abhors; it wants and will have noise, wherever it is. Its conception of a happy day in the country out of doors is one spent in close company with hordes of its fellow-beings; it dislikes and is afraid to be alone in quiet places. This is a modern manifestation of mass-disease, a kind of agoraphobia—a fear of open

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spaces. There are still a few strange individuals who prefer to be alone or in company with only a few friends when in the country, but they are in a minority and much out of fashion just now, and are looked upon by the majority as being eccentric or worse. It is always a good thing to hear the views of the other side. In my very humble way I strive to be an apostle of the quiet life, with the motto "live and let alone." Let us consider the question from the point of view of the opposite camp. Let us examine a leaflet published by the Southern Railway to advertise a novel class of outing or excursion. I have a copy of this curious brochure before me and cannot demonstrate better the mentality which likes to take its pleasures in herds than by quoting from it.

A MOONLIGHT WALK !

over the South Downs

to witness

Sunrise from Chanctonbury Ring

with Mr. S. P. B. Mais (of Wireless fame),

on Saturday (night), 16th July.

Special Supper on Breakfast Car Train.

Then follows the time-table, which shows that if you missed the 12.10 a.m. at Victoria you might still catch the train at Balham at 12.23 a.m. At 1.45 a.m. trains full of jolly noctambulists drew into Steyning station and the rain began. Those who on the journey down had bought for one shilling a "snack-box" to ease their pangs of hunger before breakfasting on the return train, which was to leave Steyning at 7.20 a.m., had acted wisely, more wisely than they knew. The details of the march up the steep and slippery sides of Chanctonbury, headed by Mr. Mais, I can

only tell from hearsay. I was not of the party; I was asleep in bed. The rain, I understand, never ceased, and on the top of Chanctonbury there is little cover or shelter from inclement weather. Fortunately it was not driving rain, rather a drizzle, but very penetrating. The sun was due to rise at four o'clock, but a good while before that small flashes of light, quickly extinguished, showed where impatient sun-worshippers were lighting matches to see by their watches how much longer they were to wait. What Mr. Mais was doing all this while to entertain and help to pass away the weary hours of waiting I do not know; my informants are silent on that point. At last four o'clock came but not the sun, while the drizzle turned to a wet, thick fog.

I am told it was extremely cold up there. I was in bed at the time. To cut short a long and sad story, the sun never rose at all, or if it did it rose so modestly and coyly behind heavy clouds as to be undiscerned, so that the promise made by Mr. Mais and the Southern Railway that the ramblers would "experience the novel thrill of watching a Summer Dawn from the first streaks to the full sunrise" was not fulfilled.

At the foot of the handbill I have quoted is the following note: "Ramblers wishing to return later in the day and to have a further walk and lounge on the Downs on Sunday, can return from Steyning by the 2.37 p.m. train, reaching home in time to 'sleep the clock round' and so feel quite fit for business on Monday."

Few, if any, took advantage of this kindly offer of a further lounge or ramble, and there was a hurried rush to catch the 7.30 a.m. breakfast train for home. But many of the ramblers lost their way and missed the train, and the approaches to Steyning station were blocked with shivering sun-worshippers sheltering from the rain. Often and often have I watched the sun rise on the Ring, but never

watched it rise *from* the Ring; nor do I suppose I ever will. But if I do, it shall be alone, or with one companion, for preference Mr. Mais.

One of our chief rustic pleasures is auctions. To us who live buried in the depths of the country a sale at a country house is as important and exciting an event as a Royal Procession or the arrival at Victoria Station of a film star is to a Londoner. These sales by auction take place at private houses or else at the market sale rooms at Steyning. Great excitement prevails when the news is announced by post or poster that a sale is to be held in the neighbourhood. When a householder moves house he takes away with him everything of value, and leaves behind to be sold at auction all the useless flotsam and jetsam which collects in every house as the years go by. It is to gloat over and to bid for this cast-off lumber that we country men and women go, regarding it as an occasion not to be missed. Some of the goods fetch fabulous prices, but there are two articles which always evoke the highest bidding. These are wheelbarrows and garden rollers. A sale may be going badly, bidders may be hanging back, but when one of these useful garden appliances comes under the auctioneer's hammer, instantly the whole atmosphere becomes electrified. Bidding begins and goes briskly on. The crowd seems to lose its head and all sense of proportion at the sight of an old wheelbarrow or an ancient garden roller. These fetch preposterous prices, often going for more than a new one would cost. We seldom attend these auctions ourselves, because our house is already fully supplied with the sort of thing that is sold at them. But one day a catalogue arrived by post from the auctioneers at Steyning of a sale of Antique and Modern Furniture to be held at the Market Sale Rooms. The property had belonged to a very respected wheelwright, who had inherited an old-established family business which unfortunately he had drunk into liquidation.

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Glancing idly through the catalogue my wife's eye fell on Lot 134, a Lowestoft bowl, which reminded her that there was a space in her china cupboard which would be well filled by such a piece. So on the morning before the sale, when the goods were on view, we went down to the sale room and inspected the bowl. It turned out to be a very nice bowl and just what my wife wanted. After deciding to bid for it we left the hall, as the rest of the exhibits appeared to be rubbish. We were at some loss to know how much we ought to offer for the bowl, but decided to go up to five pounds for it. So off we went to the office of the auctioneers, and gave instructions to the clerk to bid up to five pounds for the lot we had selected. On the morning following the sale we were all agog to know if the bowl was ours or not, so I telephoned to the auctioneers to inquire. Yes, it was all quite right, our bid of five pounds had been enough and Lot 143 was ours. Before ringing off I told the clerk I would go down at once in the car to fetch it away. "Oh," said the voice at the other end of the wire, "it was much too big to go in a car, so we have sent it by the carrier up to your house." Before I could ask him why he considered my car too small to carry one Lowestoft bowl the line was cut off. While we were still cogitating over this curious piece of news, Harris came into the room to announce that the carrier had called and left some goods from the auctioneers. We hurried out to find piled up in the stable yard a great heap of strange objects. What could it all mean? Then suddenly the riddle was solved, for tied to one strange object was the sale ticket with No. 143 printed clearly on it. I had made an idiotic mistake, for I remembered then that I had told the auctioneer's clerk to bid for No. 143 instead of No. 134.

And this is what we got for our five pounds.

A folding trench periscope, an old family Bible, a footstool with needlework top, a bagatelle board with two cues

and one ball, an old oil painting in gilt frame, "View of Sudbury," signed "John Cunstable" (*sic*), a copper egg-boiler, fifteen brass stair-rods, one bamboo overmantel, twenty old gramophone records, a strip of art carpet and a night commode arm-chair with stuffed seat upholstered in cretonne.

Not a bad lot either for five pounds. When next the vicar applies to us for a contribution to his annual jumble sale he will not apply in vain.

Another of our rustic pleasures, though it is one which does not compare in popularity with an auction, is the fortnightly court of magistrates. The proceedings take place in the Town Hall, where the acoustics are so bad that only those members of the public seated in the front row are able to hear the wise remarks and decisions of the justices.

It has been my privilege once a year to appear before the bench for the crime of neglecting to take out the annual dog licence for our Hawkins. With the exception of the two women justices of the peace and the alert chairman, the magistrates are, if I may say so—no, better not. I am certain to forget the licence for Hawkins next time it becomes due, and there is the faint possibility that some member of the bench might have read these words. British justice is incorruptible, but all the same our country magistrates are but human. To be appointed a Justice of the Peace, to be able to put J.P. after his name, is perhaps next the title of M.F.H. the greatest and most-sought-after goal of the English country gentleman. Mostly they are chosen from amongst the gentry, with a woman or two thrown in just to show how broadminded we are over the question of sex, while a shopkeeper or two may be added as a solace to the growing Socialistic minority. Originally women were made justices on the supposition that then women delinquents would get not only fair play but more lenient treat-

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ment in the courts, but in actual practice it has been found that the presence of women magistrates on the bench has had the opposite effect, for women have proved themselves to be far more ruthless on wrongdoers of their own sex than ever any man was.

CHAPTER VIII

WINTER has its compensations. I have known people to assert that they preferred winter to summer. I never believe them. I think they say it to create effect. I have noticed that these lovers of the winter always tell you this on a sweltering summer day; they are curiously reticent about it on a cold wet one in January. If you inquire why they prefer winter to summer, they are certain to tell you it is because the trees are bare of leaves then and the delicate tracery of their branches and twigs is exposed to view. The truth of this I grant, but no amount of tracery will persuade me that our English winters are comparable to our English summers.

There is but one unquestionable advantage which winter holds over summer, and that one is seldom mentioned. In the winter you have the Downs entirely to yourself. There are many lovely spots in the neighbourhood, with extensive views over the Downs and across the twenty or more miles of flat country which lie between the South and the North Downs. It is never safe to visit any of these delectable places on a summer's day. To do so you run the risk of meeting hordes of your fellow-men and women, hikers, trippers, motorists, and holiday-makers, it does not matter which, for they are mostly noisy-talking human beings and the spell is broken. I do not dislike my fellow-men as individuals, but I do dislike them exceedingly in companies, crowds, and multitudes. It is this unsocial bias which has prevented me from ever attending a race meeting or any other out-of-doors festivity where crowds are gathered together, and which is perhaps why I am so fond of angling by a pond or river-side. The winter is the best

time for long walks across the Downs, for then you may be out half the day and never meet one solitary human being but an old shepherd, who does not count, for he is as much a part of the Downs as are his sheep or the gorse bushes or the dew-ponds.

There is only one other class of person who can honestly choose the winter, and that is your out-and-out fox-hunting man or woman. And even in this case it is not the winter itself they like best, but the season of the year when this favourite—and more often only—sport or occupation can be followed. Who but a fox-hunter or a pheasant shooter would stop in England if he had the chance to go abroad during the dark, damp, and dreary months of January and February, yes, and of March too, for March is a sham and a delusion with its occasional spring-like days to raise hopes of spring, which are quickly dashed by blinding snow-storms? Who, on a dismal February day in England, has not longed to bask in the warm sunshine in some southern land, and to inhale the scent of flowers beneath a deep blue cloudless sky? I do not deny that there are rare and lovely days in England in the early part of the year. A sharp frost in the air, a pale blue sky above, and crisp hard ground below are exhilarating as an occasional novelty. It is the rain, and the mud, and the cold, and the short dark days which break a man's heart and set him longing for the spring and the sunshine. Not that there are no compensations other than the tracery of trees and rare days of sunshine. There is the purple brownness of the hanging woods on the hillsides, and the glowing bronze carpet of wet beech leaves on the ground. Autumn steals on us almost imperceptibly with its abundance of fruit and colour. The last chiff-chaff makes his polite adieu one day in mid-October, after the last of the migrants, the swallows and the house-martins, have slipped away without a word and scarcely noticed. The evenings begin to draw in, as the saying is,

log-fires are lighted, pervading the whole house with a comfortable sense of snugness. But it is after the hectic festival of Christmas in a house full of children that the mischief begins. Nevertheless, even before the end of January there are a few welcome hints that something better is in store. A few modest flowers appear, which are all the more welcome at that bleak season: winter-sweet, viburnum fragrans, and yellow winter jasmine. Here in the extreme South of England, in a mild winter such as this one has been, many flowers were blooming by the middle of February, though some of them were a month before their usual time. Daphne, yellow aconites, snowdrops, snowflakes, Christmas rose, veronica, polyanthus in some damp ground by the miniature waterfall, iris stylosa with its brave blue petals on a short stalk, violets in the cold frame, forsythia and sea buckthorn, yellow, white, and purple crocuses in the lawn, and daphne mezereum. Some of the untrimmed hedgerows were already, in this phenomenally early season, powdered white with the blossoms of the wild plum, yellow lamb's-tails wagged in the breeze, and on one sunny sheltered bank we found a cluster of pale blue dog violets, as well as a few periwinkles in flower. Yellow primroses were to be seen in some places, principally in the woods and coppices which were cut down and cleared a year ago. We have not been without at least one bunch of these flowers in the house ever since November.

It may well be asked, "What is this ungrateful fellow grumbling at? He seems to dwell in a place which in the depth of winter is a floral paradise." But the flowers which we are so thankful for are not in such profusion as appears from reading their names written down in a list. They are with us and very welcome, too, but each bloom and cluster has to be looked for and separately admired. The drawing-room, our living-room, is filled with flowering plants from the hot-houses: tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, narcissi,

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cinerarias, cyclamen, primulas. Later on the whole room will be permeated by the scent of that sweetest smelling of all the Australian heaths, baronia. By the end of February there is the excitement of the daily morning walk round the garden to discover what new marvel has occurred during the night. And there is the never-fading joy of finding the first nest of a blackbird and the thrill of seeing and holding in your hand the first speckled egg.

Everyone who lives in the country should, if possible, have a hot-house. Not only is it useful for supplying flowers for the house, but also for grapes, peaches, and nectarines. A well-warmed greenhouse is a pleasant place to go to on a cold winter's day, far more pleasant than a walk along muddy lanes. Ours has other attractions for us than flowers and fruit trees, about which I shall discourse elsewhere in this book.

But there are still two other important compensations for those who must stay at home in England at the worst season of the year; these are guests and books. Books shall be considered later. They are a subject of importance, and so is the subject of guests. I marvel at the good nature of people who will consent to leave their own comfortable homes to go away to stay at other people's houses in the winter. In the winter there is no place like home, one's own home, unless it be a foreign country far south. Amiable, tolerant, kind-hearted friends! I have always looked upon friendship and the cultivation of friends as one of the essentials of life. Many people take friends and friendship for granted; it does not occur to them that friendship, like a rare plant, requires cultivating, fostering, and encouraging. Friendship should not be left to chance. It is worth while taking trouble over, else old friends are apt to drift apart, particularly if one of them is a dweller in obscure retirement in the country. Far rather would I continue to toil for my

living amongst friends all my life than live in affluent retirement surrounded only by acquaintances. Living in retirement, though not necessarily affluently, gives time and opportunity for keeping up with old friends and for making new ones, to sit down periodically to write letters to them, without waiting for some pressing reason to do so. What it is that draws two people together in friendship is sometimes difficult to explain. Not difficult though when the two are of the same profession or calling; they have a common interest to bind them, and "shop" is a powerful bond, and, within limits, the talking of "shop" need not be tedious. I have found it more difficult to make and keep up friendship with people who do not have, or never had, any profession or job in life. Those who have earned their own livelihood generally make the best friends. This may be because those who have seriously occupied their minds doing something worth while are far more interesting as companions than those who have never been forced by circumstances to continue doing anything after it had become irksome. To listen to a man talking with enthusiasm about his work is generally interesting and often stimulating.

Good talk is becoming as rare as a "boneshaker" bicycle, what with bridge, the cinema, and the wireless. What a lot these three have to answer for. I was brought up in an atmosphere of good talk. When still but a little boy I used to sit quietly in a corner at home listening to long conversations between my father and such masters of the lost art as Henry James, Henry Harland, Arthur Balfour, Andrew Lang, Joseph Pennell, and Lady Dorothy Nevill. When I grew older there was George Moore, a good talker if ever there was one, and Robert Ross, Ray Lankester, Lord Haldane, and a host of others.

What discussions went on! Even to me, a boy, and then a youth, these discussions were absorbing to listen to. It

must not be thought that from these early associations I lay any claim whatever to be a good talker myself. Far from it. The only claim I make is to be a good listener, a humble but necessary adjunct to the noble art. Of the three arch-enemies of conversation the wireless is the most pernicious. Not only is talk out of the question while its clamour goes on, but it is quite impossible to read a book, at least any book requiring the reader's attention. I have known houses where the wireless was, as it were, nailed to the mast, or permanently on tap, from after breakfast until late at night, when the household bemazed, deafened, and stunned sought peace and quiet in their beds.

An over-cultured male voice, of great volume and penetration, informs the room, empty or full, of the current price of mutton at Nottingham, the results of professional football matches, or the state of the weather between Iceland and the North of Scotland. Suddenly a hot jazz breaks in to throb or jar your eardrums. An S O S call may be interlarded begging that some devoted son who left home seventeen years ago, and who has not been heard from since, should go immediately to an address in Liverpool, where his mother lies dangerously ill.

The wireless is all very well in the home if it is taught to know its place. I am not sure that a wireless should not be like a good little girl, "seen but not heard." It would not be half or a quarter so bad if the programme was studied beforehand and only a good concert or an interesting talk switched on. Mr. Joseph Thorp, who is no enemy of the wireless, hits the nail truly on the head when, in his book "Design for Transition," he asserts that what is "emphatically needed is instruction in the technique of knowing when to switch off the wireless—as important a branch of culture as switching it on."

Round games, played with pencil and paper after tea in

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country houses where there are children, are useful to pass the time. Billiards, as a country-house pastime, seems to have died a very natural death. It never was a really frolicsome game, and now the dreariest room in the house can be put to some more cheerful use. But a really good game is shove ha'penny. Young or old, "Varsity blue" or "literary gent," highbrow or lowbrow, they all can play it, and all have an equal chance of winning. The merest duffer at field sports or games need not be afraid, for skill at shove ha'penny may lie dormant in any one of us. But better than any indoor game, round or otherwise, is to sit with your friends after dinner before a great open hearth where big logs burn, and talk.

The question of what to do with your week-end guests is a serious one calling for careful thought and consideration. Nothing can be more tiresome than to arrive at a country house and find that your host and hostess have made out a programme. If week-end guests be left alone to amuse themselves they will come to stay with you again. Some well-meaning hosts have the mistaken belief that their guests will be bored if every waking hour has not its allotted entertainment. Endless walks, lengthy tours of inspection of empty flower-beds which are going to be a blaze of colour later on, even the pigsties and the stables, must not be missed. Neighbours have been invited in to tea and dinner. After a week-end of this sort the exhausted guest is thankful when Monday comes and he can return to London and his work. The whole art, and art it is, of entertaining week-end guests is to get them to do what you want them to do without their knowing it. Handled tactfully, a week-ender can be got to do almost anything, and to do it willingly. Before entering into details as to how this should be done, a word or two about food and drink will not be out of place. A guest expects, and has a perfect right to expect, more and better food than he is used to getting at

home. There are hostesses, I regret to say, who underfeed their guests. Rather than that this should happen, overfeed them. After all, if illness should follow this unwonted high living, they will be safely back in their own homes by then, and you will be spared that worst of all inflictions, a sick guest in the house.

This matter of food is most important. On inquiry, you usually learn that your guest does not ever have tea brought to the bedside when called, does not eat anything for breakfast except one cup of coffee and a small piece of toast and marmalade, and that afternoon tea spoils her appetite for dinner. But nevertheless she does drink up the tea which she found beside her on waking, does eat a hearty "English" breakfast, and afternoon tea does not appear to spoil her appetite for dinner. Which of us has not stayed at country houses where they did not get enough to eat? It was the distressing experience of a friend of ours which makes us err, if anything, on the side of overfeeding our guests. This lady went to pay a visit at rather a grand house in Warwickshire. Her hostess was a rich widow who lived by herself with a large retinue of servants. Our friend arrived very hungry after her journey, just at tea-time. Besides the actual tea itself there were two minute cress sandwiches, one of which she devoured with zest, comforting herself with the thought of dinner in a few hours' time. But the dinner proved a sad disappointment. There were plenty of courses, but each one amounted only to a mouthful, so that when she and her hostess left the dining-table for the drawing-room she was still famished. Her hostess was an early retiree and at ten o'clock she escorted her friend to her bedroom and wished her good-night. The bedroom was a comfortable one, with a bright fire blazing on the hearth. Our friend undressed and got into bed, but could not sleep. She was ravenously hungry, and it soon became obvious that unless she had something substantial to eat she would

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lie awake all night. Before long she became desperate and rather timidly rang the bell. A smiling housemaid appeared, to whom she confided her trouble, and asked if she possibly could have something to eat. The maid, who did not appear in the least surprised, told her that there was absolutely nothing to eat in the house but the cold remains of a round of beef. This she soon produced, with some pickles and a loaf of bread and some butter, and spread the simple repast upon a small table drawn up close before the fire. Our friend soon settled down to enjoy a hearty meal. Just as she was in the very act of helping herself to one more slice of the delicious cold beef there was a gentle tap at the door and the next instant the door opened and her hostess put her head in to inquire if she had everything she wanted. The situation of the guest at the supper table was an embarrassing one. She was never invited to stop there again.

For better or for worse the custom of holding family worship has died out in most country houses. I well remember as a child taking part in those domestic religious exercises when staying with an aunt who lived in a big house on Stanmore Common. After breakfast the family seated themselves along one side of the dining-room, and at a signal given by my aunt, Cox, the family butler, would fling open a side door through which trooped in the whole domestic staff, headed by the vast but majestic form of Mrs. Beamish, the cook, enveloped in a glistening starched print dress. The staff used to sit on a row of chairs along the opposite side of the room. One day a somewhat precocious little boy who was stopping there was allowed, as a great privilege, to read the lesson for the day. He enjoyed doing this and read it quite well, in a loud, piping voice, but whenever he came to the name of God he always read it "dog," a trifling slip of the tongue which entirely altered the interpretation of the sacred message!

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As has already been remarked, only a little tactful handling is needed to persuade even the most unhandy and inexperienced guest to make himself useful about the place, and to do so quite unwittingly. To anybody whose privilege it has been to see Clifford Bax with his coat off feeding the flames of a roaring bonfire, or Alec Waugh with his coat on spending a morning sawing right through one slender branch of a tree, or Dod and Ernest Procter, covered by mud, cleaning out a pond, the truth of the above statement will be acknowledged. The actual technique employed to bring about this result is more or less on the following lines. Suppose, for example, there is a hedge overgrown with brambles which needs clearing up. Without any previous warning, host and hostess appear in their oldest clothes, wearing thick leather hedging gloves, and armed with sharp hooks and clippers or secateurs. They brightly exclaim, "We are off to cut out some brambles, and hope you won't mind being left to yourselves; tea is at four-thirty." The odds are that the guileless guests will beg to be allowed to come too—just to watch. Now they are lost, for in every properly equipped country house there is a supply of spare clippers, gloves, choppers, pruning saws, and other implements kept on purpose for visitors. On arrival at the hedge or bramble patch host and hostess start vigorously to clip and cut. Very soon the onlookers, with less vigour at first, will follow suit. Before long they will all have become imbued with that feeling of bitter hatred which comes from handling or being torn by brambles and they will be hard at it with clipper and chopper. Now is the time, if he has other things to do, for the host to mutter some sort of excuse about having forgotten his special hedging-knife and disappear from the scene of action. Many a pleasant winter afternoon have I spent with a book in an easy chair by the fireside in my own room, an afternoon made all the more pleasant by the thought of those others

wholesomely and usefully employed putting our hedges into order.

But the most irresistible attraction for the week-end, more so even than paddling in ponds, is a bonfire. A bonfire has never been known to fail, even in the case of the least agriculturally minded of all our welcome guests. The opening ceremony for bonfires is much the same as for hedging, but the regalia in this case includes a hay-rake, a bundle of old newspapers, and a box of matches. True masters of the art of bonfire burning do not require the aid of petrol or paraffin. The snare is never laid in vain. Your guests follow you willingly, under the impression that they are going to stand about and chat round a bonfire while you do all the work. But no sooner is the fire well alight and the flames beginning to roar and the twigs to crackle than these self-same spectators will be dragging great branches or armfuls of dry twigs and brambles to throw on to the blazing heap.

At tea-time they will return to the house, hot, tired, but happy. Why is it, I wonder, that two such complete opposites as fire and water should both be such unfailing attractions? A bonfire or a stream, who is there who can resist either? When the days are hot there are the ponds and streams where happy idle hours may be spent, though in the summer our streams become little more than trickles. To clear the ponds of weeds or to catch specimens for the aquarium waders can be worn, or on really hot days a bathing-suit. There is always something to do at a stream, however small it is. Dams can be built to form miniature salmon pools, which are then stocked with minnows or sticklebacks.

Along the sides of our ponds and streams are kingcups, which grow luxuriantly in the black, oozy mud, and in April and May make the little valley a blaze of gold. In the

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early spring we go to a certain waterlogged spinney near by where kingcups abound, and fill sacks and buckets with roots pulled tenderly out of the mud to reinforce our own flower sanctuary.

Tree-felling or the sawing off of dead branches is a winter occupation which approaches too closely to hard work. Almost any guest will start with enthusiasm to cut down a small tree, or to saw off a branch of a big one, particularly if he is allowed to stand on a ladder, but it is another matter to keep him at the job for long. Arms and back soon begin to ache, and letters which want answering are suddenly remembered. Now and again, but all too rarely, some guest who is also a knowledgeable gardener asks to be allowed to weed. Permission has never been refused.

The subject of spare field and garden implements for the use of visitors calls to mind how seldom our male guests arrive for a week-end with a complete outfit of clothing for dinner. Some are more remiss than others. Forgetfulness seems to be more marked in certain professions. Carefully prepared statistics have shown that the members of certain professions are more forgetful than others. The first three in order of neglectfulness in the matter of packing are as follows:

1. Poets.
2. Musical composers.
3. Painters.

To meet this difficulty a supply is always kept in the house of spare tooth-brushes, shaving-soap, razor-blades, dressing-gowns, collars, studs, cuff-links, black ties, and evening shoes. The holder of the record for arriving with the smallest number of necessary articles for evening wear is Clifford Bax, who may be given the credit for having done more

than any other visitor to put the poets at the head of the professional league. While dressing for dinner one never-to-be-forgotten Friday evening a message came from Clifford Bax begging the loan of a collar, size $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches. A few minutes later another came from him for the loan of a collar stud and an evening waistcoat. This was not the end of it, for the maid came back again to say that Mr. Bax was very sorry but he seemed to have come without any black socks and could I lend him an evening shirt. I went with these myself to his room to inquire if now he had everything he wanted. I gathered he had not, and so in order to simplify matters I asked him to tell me exactly what he had brought down and then I would supply the required garments. With something of a sheepish expression, the poet confessed that the only articles of evening dress he seemed to have packed in his bag were three evening ties.

Other very useful things to keep in a country house are rubber gum-boots. These should be stocked in all sizes for both sexes. With a pair of these and a waterproof a guest can be inveigled out of the house on the wettest of days. These rubber boots are particularly useful, necessary indeed, in a country like ours, which is famous for its mud. Sussex men and Sussex pigs have always been remarkable for their long legs. This curious local characteristic is said to be caused by the inhabitants having to be always dragging their feet out of the deep soft clay, which in time stretches their lower limbs to an astonishing degree.

Only once has a guest at Crossbows come under the suspicion of the local police force. In this case it all happened through a misunderstanding, though it must be admitted that the mistake was a perfectly justifiable one. It happened in the merry month of May that a man hunt took place on the Downs in our neighbourhood. I need not

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recount all the squalid details of the chase, but merely state that a young burglar had fired a revolver at and wounded a policeman and had then escaped. A hue-and-cry was raised and every Worthing blackshirt and boy scout, as well as every available policeman, was out, day and night, quartering the ground where the criminal was suspected to be hiding. Even the aid of bloodhounds was employed. The excitement was stupendous and not only local, for the London newspapers were full of stories about our "Man Hunt."

Here, for example, is what was reported in the *Evening Standard* on May 30th, 1934:

A picturesque figure who helped the police in the bloodhound search was Mr. Theodore T. Green, a well-known hunting man. He wore hunting dress with velvet cap. Mr. Green was about to leave home to attend his sister's funeral when a request to take charge of the bloodhounds came to him. When the hounds lost the scent Mr. Green, mounted on a police horse, led them on to a shrill blast of a hunting-horn.

These well-meant efforts of the picturesque Mr. Green were unavailing, and in the end the criminal was run to earth and sudden death by another, though a less picturesque, bloodhound-hunter from elsewhere.

It was before this happened, and while the hunted fugitive was still alive and at large, that our guest, Patrick Hadley, fell under suspicion. For the benefit of those who only know him by his musical compositions and not by sight, I must explain that Mr. Hadley is a very handsome broad-shouldered young man, with black eyes and black curly hair—in fact of very striking personal appearance. One odd habit he has—one which is only found in Londoners when on a visit to the country—of going for long walks before breakfast. On this particular morning he had taken a

longer walk than usual up to and beyond Chanctonbury Ring. Handsome as he undoubtedly is, Mr. Hadley will, I am sure, forgive me when I suggest that dressed in an old tennis-shirt, a pair of even older flannel trousers, his curls unbrushed and with a blue-black unshaven chin, he does not look—well, not so dapper as he does after he has had a bath and a shave. We were all at breakfast when our guest complained to us of the bad manners of our postman. In answer to our request for some explanation Hadley told us that, as he was hurrying back up the drive, rather hot and foot-sore, he had met the postman on his bicycle and wished him “good morning.” Instead of a polite reply the postman gave him one searching, rather frightened stare, and then bent over his handlebars and pedalled furiously down the drive in the direction of the village. Before breakfast was over a sequel to this incident occurred. There was a loud ringing of the front-door bell, and the servant came to say that the police wished to interview me. On going to the front door I was met by two plain-clothes policemen, and several others could be seen on guard at the end of the drive. The chief policeman came quickly to the point by inquiring if a suspicious character had been seen about the house. On my telling him there had not, he asked me who we had stopping with us. Then like a flash I saw what had happened and how the scared postman must have reported by telephone his meeting with what was evidently the “wanted” man, and the police had rushed up in their fast car to make the arrest. In spite of my assurances about the respectability of our guest the chief policeman insisted on seeing him for himself. I went back to the breakfast-room to explain all this and to ask Hadley to step out for a moment to reassure the policeman, but he was nowhere to be seen. As often happens in such cases with the perfectly innocent, panic had seized him and he had locked himself into the smallest room in the house and for a

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long while refused to come out of it. At last he did, but not before the policeman had begun to become very suspicious of this strange guest of ours. In the end everything was explained and the police went off fully satisfied that we were not hiding the wanted criminal.

CHAPTER IX

No two assets to a country house are more to be treasured than books and friends. Books have this advantage over friends, that we have them always with us, while our friends can be with us only occasionally. To you who read these lines, the very idea of a bookless house cannot be imagined. Once I thought as you do, but later on I was to become disillusioned. I was born and bred in a house which was chock-a-block with books from cellar to attic. All the houses which we as children visited were full of books, so that I grew up with the notion that all houses were like ours and those of our friends, and that books formed an essential part of a house as a wireless set does to-day. I have let slip in these pages that I once was a doctor, and before the War practised my art and mystery on the inhabitants of a village in the New Forest. It was my duty and privilege as a doctor to have the entry to every sort of house, from the mud-walled thatched cottage of the peasant to the Stately Home of the Great. This privilege of admittance to every class of human habitation is one enjoyed by only one profession other than that of medicine; I refer to that of the undertaker.

Now, it is of the greatest assistance to a doctor when visiting a new patient for the first time to find out all he can about him, or her, quite apart from the actual ailment. The doctor should discover, if he can, the sort of life his patient leads, his amusements as well as his work, and the kind of mental atmosphere he lives in. Let us suppose that a message has come to the surgery for the doctor to go at once to see Mrs. So-and-so. I will take you, dear reader, with me in the car. In due time we arrive opposite the

house, which tells us something, but not very much, about the patient we are about to examine. It places her in a sort of ill-defined class, but nothing more. It is inside the house that we hope, if opportunity presents itself, to solve the problem. While the patient upstairs is being warned of our arrival and hurried tidying-up are being made to the bedroom, we will take a look round the best parlour, the drawing-room, or the smoking-room into which we have been ushered. Please do not imagine us creeping about the room, poking our noses into bureau, writing-desk, or cupboard. Far from it. We begin with a glance at the furniture and the wallpaper, but it is the pictures on the walls, and particularly the family photographs, which give more away. But of all the objects in a room which help us to "place" our patient and the family more accurately than any other are the books. It was not until I entered into private practice that I learned how many houses contained no books at all. No *real* books, I mean. Of course almost every house I visited, larger than a cottage, had one or two technical works bound up in covers. The majority of these were about dogs and their ailments, though books about gardening and poultry-keeping followed not far behind, while manuals on the care and breeding of hutch rabbits were also in evidence. I remember in particular one book at a patient's house which caught my eye. Its well-worn condition showed evidence of frequent close study, and for one moment I was sorely tempted to put it in my pocket. It was a small thin octavo volume bearing the title "Fancy Mice for Pleasure and Profit." The name of the author I do not recollect. As it seemed to be the only book in the house I discreetly resisted the urge to acquire it. In all my wanderings into the second-hand bookshops since that day I have kept an eye open for another copy of this work, but so far without success.

Quite another type of house was the Stately Home,

where generally row upon row of books stood uninvitingly in sombre bookcases, often behind wire netting, and one recognized those books which are described in the catalogues of second-hand booksellers as being "suitable for the library of a Country Gentleman." In those grand houses books had been taught to know their place, which was in the bookcases, and not to go wandering about hither and thither. Amongst them there were certain to be copies of such old favourites as "The Comic History of England," Morris's "History of British Birds," "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," Strutt's "English Sports and Pastimes," Cassell's "Dictionary of Gardening," and "The Conquest of Peru," while in uniform calf bindings would be such classics as the novels of Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Whyte Melville, and Anthony Trollope. You seldom saw a new book in these houses. But every now and again, though all too seldom, you might come across a house where books were books. Not only books neatly arranged on shelves but also, as books should be, scattered about the rooms on tables and chairs. Then you knew that you were about to take on the care of a congenial patient, and a sympathetic footing between patient and doctor is good for both. In such a house as this there would be modern books just published, as Mr. H. G. Wells's latest novel, or one of Thomas Hardy's or Mr. Rudyard Kipling's. In some houses there might be evidence of daring modernism in a volume of George Moore, but such cases were rare. George Moore was just a little too unveiled to suit the taste of most of my patients.

I believe more books are bought nowadays than there used to be, though I still meet people, educated, intelligent people, who although they subscribe regularly to a good lending library and read all the best new books, scarcely ever buy a book. This is a state of mind very difficult to

understand, for a house without books is like a garden without flowers.

As to what books, the kind of books, and how many books a retired dweller in the country should choose I shall not presume to suggest. It is a matter so purely of personal choice and idiosyncrasy. That there must be plenty of books in the country house goes without saying, but they must be selected by the owner himself. Instead, I will venture in all humbleness to say something about the books at Crossbows, which form, I think, a fairly average library for a twentieth-century English country house whose owners have specialized, as all book-lovers are apt to do, in certain by-paths of book-collecting.

But before speaking about the books themselves a word or two will not be unfitting about the places in which the books are kept. Some houses have a library, a large room fitted on every wall with tall shelves or bookcases. We are not fortunate enough to possess such a library at Crossbows, so that almost every room in the house has to act the part, more or less, of a library. Although it is very convenient to have all your books in one large room, it is, I think, a mistake to keep all your eggs in one basket, for books should be spread about a house. No room, however humble, should be without at least one shelf of books, although I do not go so far as to agree with the host of a certain famous inn at a village in Oxfordshire, where I found a copy of one of Mr. Evelyn Waugh's works chained up in the W.C. This particular work was that amusing book "Vile Bodies," much too amusing and too long for suitable reading in a public office. As to bookcases, I am not sure if books are not better on open shelves. Glass fronts do protect books to some extent from the ravages of London fog and smoke, and precious and valuable books from the rough handling of vandals. The true book-lover handles a book tenderly and gently, but there

are thoughtless persons who will snatch at an old volume and tear away the top of the leather back in extracting it from its place on the shelf, and do other dreadful things to books.

One serious drawback to bookcases with glass doors is the liability of damp and mildew appearing on leather bindings, particularly during prolonged wet weather, if the doors are not opened from time to time to air the books.

Of all insults both to readers and to books, the greatest is the locked bookcase with wire front. Not only are such bookcases ugly, but they are insulting to the would-be reader who can see what he wants to examine and handle, but is unable to touch, and also to the books which are imprisoned behind iron bars. The ideal bookshelf or bookcase is a contrivance by which a book can be kept from harm, where its title may easily be read, and whence it can be withdrawn without trouble or difficulty. An open shelf offers you its goods for your inspection, so that you may make your choice. The open bookshelf says, "Please take one and when you have read it please put it back."

One great point in favour of having books in all the rooms is that no sort of furniture suits a room better than shelves full of books. The great thing in a country house far away from public libraries is to have a variety of books: fiction, travel books, biographies, gardening and botany books, books about your county, poetry, a few antiquarian books, and a selection of works on natural history. In addition to these there can be books on special subjects in which the owners are specially interested, or the works of some favourite author.

The only thing we have approaching a library is a long hall-way, half passage, half room, which connects the old part of the house with the new. Here are assembled books of all sorts, perhaps some three thousand. In the drawing-

room—so called—we keep our special books, including my wife's collection of herbals and my precious pirate books. Then there are three tall bookcases with glass fronts in which are kept various rare first editions, and "association" books as the dealers call them—books in which the author and friend has inscribed his name and ours. One does not like such books to be taken up to bedrooms to be read in bed and perhaps damaged. An ordinary copy of a book can be replaced, but one with a long and loving inscription in it by George Moore, for example, cannot be.

Books should be grouped together as far as possible in subjects, except in the case of a special collection of one author.

I am not certain if book-collecting is a virtue or a vice. The answer, perhaps, is that it can be and should be the first, but may easily become the second. I hope it is a virtue, for our house contains two ardent book-collectors. Of all forms of collecting surely that of collecting books is the least pernicious. If the collector happens to live in the country or even abroad, he can still pursue his hobby by means of the post, through the dealers' catalogues, although the best place of all for the collector is London. This sport, for a sport it is and one which compares very favourably with any other, can be made to fit the purse, and I question if the very wealthy book-collector gets half as much excitement and pleasure out of his hobby as the collector with limited funds at his disposal. The late Mr. Henry Huntington, of California, who formed the magnificent library now at San Marino, is said to have sometimes bought a whole library to gain possession of a single rare volume, but I doubt if he derived as much enjoyment in doing so as one of us does when after years of search we at last procure, for perhaps a few shillings, some precious item.

Then book-collecting does no harm to anybody or any-

thing, which cannot be said of some forms of collecting, such as British wild flowers, butterflies, or birds' eggs. Also, books do not take up much space, which is of no little importance in these days when so many people live in flats or small houses. Looked at in the light of a sport, book-collecting may be claimed to give as much excitement as does fox-hunting, but with what a difference! Instead of a grim stuffed mask or face of the quarry to leer reproachfully down at you until time or moths remove it, we have objects of interest, value, and beauty of which we need never tire or feel ashamed.

Books have another advantage over all other objects collected, in that they are not only good to look upon and to handle but also to read and to study, and there is as well the interest of learning about the lives of the men who wrote them.

There are two collections of books on special subjects at Crossbows. One is of old herbals, made by my wife, and although not large it is a representative one.

How noble and how dignified they look, standing in a row together on the lowest of the shelves which hold the garden and the botany books. There is an impressive dignity about these old folios, these giants among books which no other kind of book attains to. Once a certain critic and book-collector wrote, "If a man collects books, his library ought to contain a Herbal, and if he has but room for one, that should be the best," and then added, "The luxurious and sufficient thing is to possess what the book-sellers call 'the right edition of Gerard.'" To quote once more from the author of "Gossip in a Library," "There is no handsomer book to be found, none more stately or imposing, than this magnificent folio of sixteen hundred pages, with its close, elaborate letter-press, its innumerable plates, and John Payne's fine masterpiece in compartments, with Theophrastus and Dioscorides facing one another, and

the author below them, holding in his right hand the new-found treasure of the potato plant." John Gerard was a "Master in Chirurgie," but was more famous as a gardener and a botanist than as a surgeon. He lived in Holborn, where he cultivated his garden. His herbal, which was first published in 1597, was far surpassed by the second and improved edition brought out by the apothecary, Thomas Johnson, in 1633. It is this one which is "the right edition of Gerard." This noble tome contains descriptions of as many as 2,800 plants, but perhaps its principal charm to-day lies in the copious woodcuts. Of these there are more than 2,000, every one drawn in strong outline, giving the characteristics of each plant. Wherever you may happen to open it, something besides the plates is sure to catch your attention and offer entertainment. Thus there is the modest but evidently useful crowfoot, about the medicinal virtues of which Gerard has much to say. "Many do use it to lie a little of the herbe stamped with salt unto any of the fingers, against the pain of the teeth; which medicine seldome faileth, for it causeth greater paine in the finger than was in the tooth, by the meanes whereof, the greater paine taketh away the lesser," a case of a remedy far worse than the disease. "Cunning beggars do use to stampe the leaves, and lay it unto their legs and arms, which causeth such filthy ulcers as we daily see (among such wicked vagabonds) to move the people the more to pittie."

Then there is the arum lily, or "cuckowpynt or priest's pintle." Gerard, who is seldom at a loss to find a use for every plant, has an odd one for the cuckoo-pint. "Bears after they have lien in their dens forty dayes without any manner of sustenance, but what they get with licking and sucking their own feet, do as soone as they come forth eate the herbe cuckowpynt, through the windie nature thereof the hungary gut is opened and made fit again to receive sustenance." A tip well worth while know-

ing for anyone who keeps bears in dens for pleasure or profit.

Perhaps the greatest of all the English herbalists was William Turner, the "Father of British Botany." His "Herball" was published in three instalments. The first was printed in London in 1551, but having to flee the country owing to his religious opinions, the second and also the third were printed and published at Cologne. Turner, like his predecessor Gerard, is full of out-of-the-way fragments of natural history and medical lore. Writing of monk's-hood or "leopardesbayne" he tells us that if it is "layed to a scorpion, it maketh her utterlye amased and num, as assone as she toucheth agayne Hellebore or resewurt she cometh to herself agayne."

The next book on the shelf is that of Henry Lyte. This celebrated herbal is a first edition, printed in black letter, in 1578, and is a translation made by Lyte of the French version of Dodoens's famous herbal, the "Cruydeboeck." It has a fine elaborate title-page with allegorical figures of Esculapius, Apollo, Gentius, Lysimachus, Arthemisia, and Mithridates. We open the book at a page devoted to the wild English orchids, and about one of them, the butterfly orchis or slanderwort we glean the following curious piece of information. "It is written of this roote, that they shall beget sonnes, and if wemen do eate of the wythered rootes, they shall bring forth Doughters."

All the writers of herbals were either physicians, surgeons, or else apothecaries.

The author of the next volume, John Parkinson, "the last of the British herbalists," was apothecary to King James I, and botanist to King Charles I. He wrote two books. The first, "Paradisus Terrestris" is a gardening book, largely about the plants in his own garden at Long Acre. The other, "Theatrum botanicum, an Herball of Large Extent," was published in 1640, and is a curious

mixture of the then modern and the mediæval, for, in spite of his being in advance of the botanists and herbalists of his day, Parkinson still firmly believed in the medicinal value of the horn of the unicorn and of powdered mummies. What he describes as his "Manlike Worke of Herbes and Plants" he dedicated to "The Kings Most Excellent Majestie."

Another famous book, published at Mainz in 1491, differs from most other herbals by containing treatises on, and woodcuts of, beasts, birds, fishes, and minerals, as well as plants. Many of these woodcuts are extremely quaint. This book is the "Ortus Sanitatis" of "Herbarus the German," Jacob Meydenbach.

Our next volume, although not strictly a herbal at all, is one which should find a place in any collection of herbals. It is the English translation of the Spanish physician, Nicolas Monardis's "Joyfull Newes out of the Newe Founde Worlde," published in 1577. One of its principal interests is the first figure or drawing of the tobacco plant and a long account of the medicinal virtues of this new introduction to the old world from the new.

The above brief account of my wife's collection of herbals was written solely in order to give me an excuse to talk at some length concerning my own collection of books about pirates. This consists of some three hundred printed publications and manuscripts, all to do with pirates and piracy. Not, I dare say, a very respectable class of person or calling to collect books about, and one which can hardly claim to be called literature, except in a few cases. If literature it be, then it is one of the less reputable backwaters of letters. But the collecting of books about pirates has its points. Whatever unkind things may be said of my choice, no one can accuse my heroes or authors of being either dull or unexciting. I have often been asked how I came to collect such queer books, and after due considera-

tion I think I perceive three influences. The earliest of these is the one I like to think was responsible.

As a child we lived in a house in Paddington which overlooked the Regent's Canal. Often on warm summer evenings our guests sat with us on the balcony. One of these guests I can just remember. He had long, lank hair, and owing to his delicate health used to wear over his shoulders a red silk shawl of my mother's. This most welcome visitor used to tell my sisters and me exciting stories about pirates and pieces of eight and walking-the-plank. His name was Robert Louis Stevenson. Possibly heredity played a part in my love for pirates. For several generations my family was closely connected with Newfoundland, and the sons used to be sent out there from Poole to trade in cod-fish, whale oil, and seals. During the sixteenth century Newfoundland was the great recruiting centre for the more enterprising pirates, such as Sir Henry Mainwaring and Captain Peter Easton. It was the lucky chance of finding Mr. Compton Mackenzie sitting next me one day at lunch at the Savile Club that made me put into practice an idea which was already at the back of my mind. Naturally the conversation soon got on to the subject of small islands. Mr. Mackenzie had, if I remember rightly, just purchased another one. From this the talk wandered to shipwrecked mariners cast ashore on lonely islands and by natural stages pirates were introduced. Mr. Mackenzie told me a lot about pirates, some he had known personally, and he recommended several pirate books for me to read. These I bought, and from that moment became an inveterate collector of such books. One of those which Mr. Mackenzie advised me to read was "The Cradle of the Deep," by Sir Frederick Treves. It proved to be an enchanting book, in which the author, taking his reader by the hand, wanders with him from one West Indian island to another, with occasional excursions to the Spanish Main, discoursing the

while of the great days of the past and of the daring deeds and bloody exploits of the buccaneers. Again and again the author quotes a certain buccaneer, Alexander Exquemeling, who wrote the "History of the Buccaneers of America." I tried to obtain a copy of this work, but it was some while before I came across even a reprint of this rare work, and when I did my fate was sealed. During the years which followed I was fortunate enough to procure copies of all the early English editions of Exquemeling's history, even a copy of the very rare first edition published in 1684. This book may be described as being one of the two classics of pirate literature. The other is a book now extremely rare called "The History of the Pyrates," published in 1724, which continued for more than a century to be a best-seller. The author was a mysterious Captain Charles Johnson, whose identity still baffles historians. Whoever he was, he knew his pirates intimately and wrote excellent vivid prose. Some people maintain he was Daniel Defoe, but there is no proof of this. I soon found that Exquemeling and Charles Johnson were most useful names of introduction to the inner sanctums of the more exclusive London antiquarian booksellers.

In the collecting of books it is a great asset to be a pioneer in your own particular field. If several collectors are after books by the same author or on the same subject, the booksellers quickly get to hear of it and up go the prices. Luckily for me no one else was after pirate books when I began to collect them, so that I had no competitors to speak of so far as this country was concerned, although I discovered I had several serious rivals in the United States. Many books dealing with piracy make mention of some part or other of America, and therefore they come to be catalogued by the dealers under the heading of "Americana," which always adds—or added then—to the price.

Fortunately for me I come of a book-collecting family, so

that I never had to hide my latest acquisitions and seldom had to lie about their prices. How different from the case of a certain learned don at Oxford. This worthy bibliophile, an inveterate book-collector, had a wife who disapproved in no unmeasured terms of what she called his extravagant and useless hobby. The result of this was that whenever he bought any books he instructed the bookseller to leave the parcel by night behind a laurel bush just inside his garden gate. When the coast was clear, he would slink out and smuggle it into his library.

Some bibliophiles are of opinion, and it is one I am in agreement with, that the sole object of a collection of special books is not one of numbers merely, but that it is the duty of the collector to offer to others the benefit of any knowledge he has assimilated while forming his collection. Therefore I make no apologies for having published several small and quite unimportant manuals about my pirate books. One of these, a Bibliography of the Works of Captain Charles Johnson, was published by Messrs. Dulau & Company, of Old Bond Street. It was the result of my having once embarked on an attempt to collect all the editions I could lay hands on of the mysterious Captain Johnson's two works, his "History of Pyrates" and his "History of the Highwaymen." Little did I imagine when I began what it was to lead to. When after several years I had procured all the copies of these books I could, I added to my list particulars about a few other editions which I had traced to libraries, most of them in the United States. This entailed a good deal of letter-writing to the librarians of some of the important American libraries, and in no case did I fail to receive a polite answer to my letter, and full and minute descriptions of the books I had inquired about. With this assistance from America I was able to publish a list of sixty-five different editions of Johnson's two books, giving full bibliographical particulars of each.

As is nearly always the case when such a "complete" list is made, a few other editions which I had not heard of revealed themselves afterwards, so that if ever the bibliography is reprinted, it will contain particulars of about seventy-four editions. This surely goes to prove both the popularity of Charles Johnson as a writer and of the subject of piracy.

This practice of publishing particulars about my books has caused me more than once to be hoist with my own petard. For instance, a London bookseller advertised a very rare Johnson folio and ended the description with these words, "Not in Gosse—price £70." If Gosse had only kept quiet about his books and not published a catalogue of them, no doubt the price of this copy would have been considerably lower.

In such a collection as this every size and shape of book and pamphlet appears. There are folios, quartos and octavos large and small, duodecimos, 16 mos., 24 mos., and 32 mos., broadsheets, ballads, proclamations, chap-books, news-letters, and manuscripts. I always ruthlessly excluded fiction, or otherwise there would have been no end to the collection. Some of the books have fine engravings by good artists, others crudely coloured blocks. They are written in many languages, principally in those of seafaring races, and are printed on many out-of-the-way presses, as at St. Kitts in the West Indies, Havana, Peru, Manila, Venice, Lisbon, Granada, Madrid, and amongst other North American seaport towns, Salem, Philadelphia, and Boston. Naturally, the English having been the greatest masters of piracy, England holds pride of place in the literature of the subject.

I have already said enough about my books, perhaps more than enough, so to bring the subject to a close I will give a few examples of their title-pages, which were evidently written with a view to whetting the appetite of the

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reader to peruse the pages which followed. Here is the title-page of the first English edition of the great book about the buccaneers:

BUCANIERS OF AMERICA.

or, a True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults committed of late years upon the Coasts of the West INDIES by the Bucaniers of Jamaica and Tortuga, both English and French. Wherein are contained more especially, the unparallel'd Exploits of Sir Henry Morgan, our English Jamaican Hero, who sack'd Puerto Velo, burnt Panama, &c.

London. Printed for William Crooke, at the Green Dragon without Temple-Bar. 1684.

It is hardly to be wondered at that such a book should meet with instant success. The following year the publisher reprinted it, leaving out certain statements about the English Jamaican hero who had sued him for libel and won his case, and added a second volume, having in the meanwhile obtained a very remarkable buccaneer journal. This second volume has its own title-page, which runs as follows :

BUCANIERS OF AMERICA.

The Second Volume.

Containing the Dangerous Voyage and Bold Attempts of Captain Bartholomew Sharp, and others; performed upon the Coasts of the South Sea, for the space of two years, etc. etc.

From the Original Journal of the said Voyage.
written by Mr. Basil Ringrose, Gent. who was all along present at those Transactions. 1685.

As Exquemeling was the historian of the buccaneers so was Charles Johnson of the pirates, and here is a part of the lengthy title-page of the first edition of his famous work.

A General HISTORY of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious PYRATES, and also their Policies, Discipline and Government, from their first Rise and Settlement in the Island of Providence, in 1717, to the present year 1724.

with
the remarkable Actions and Adventures of the two Female Pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonney, etc. etc. etc.

Published by Ch. Rivington at the Bible and Crown at St. Paul's Churchyard. 1724.

Some pirates got a far better "press" than did others, and the self-styled "lives" of such popular characters as Kidd, Avery, and Blackbeard sold like hot cakes. The best-known pirate to the public was not always the best man at the pirate game. The notorious Captain William Kidd, famous in story and song, was in actual fact a very second-rate pirate indeed. He suffered an ignominious end on the gallows at Wapping Stairs, more as a scapegoat for the sins of certain high-placed politicians than for the grossness of his piratical misdeeds. Captain Avery too, known in his day as the "Arch-pyrate," was another popular character. There are many curious little books and pamphlets which claim to tell the true story of his adventurous life. And adventurous it was, and romantic too, if half that appears on the title-page of one of these "lives" is to be believed.

The Life and Adventures of Capt. John Avery, the Famous English pirate (rais'd from a Cabbin-Boy, to a King.) now in possession in Madagascar. Being a succinct Account of

his Birth, Parentage, etc. etc.—His Taking a large ship, worth above a Million Sterling, belonging to the Great Mogul, with his Grand-Daughter on Board (who was going to be marry'd to the King of Persia) attended by a great Retinue of Ladies. His Marriage with the said Princess, and his Men with her Retinue, etc. etc. etc.—Written by a Person who made his Escape from thence, and faithfully extracted from his Journal.

The above is but a small part of what is printed on the title-page, and one is inclined to believe that the "blurb" so loved by the modern publisher, which gives such a glowing, if not always wholly accurate, forecast of the book's contents, originated in these self-laudatory eighteenth-century title-pages.

Perhaps it was the above "life" which drove the "Arch-pirate" to lay down his dripping sword to take up his pen instead, for another small volume appeared shortly afterwards which claimed to be written by Captain Avery himself. No one expects a successful pirate to be over-modest about himself or his deeds, an observation the truth of which is borne out by the following title-page of the pirate's autobiography.

THE KING OF PIRATES:

being an Account of the Famous Enterprises of Captain AVERY, the Mock King of Madagascar with His Rambles and Piracies; wherein all the Sham Accounts formerly published of him, are detected.

In Two Letters from himself; one during his stay at Madagascar; and one since his Escape from thence.

In a collection of such books as these it is a sore temptation to take down from the shelf and gloat over one treasure

after another. But this temptation must and shall be firmly resisted, after one more dip into the pirate tub. This time we pull out of the shelf a small thin quarto, bound in polished calf by Riviere. It is extremely rare. After reading the title you wonder whatever the editors of the "Dictionary of National Biography" were about to fail to include a biography of this great pirate when full space is allotted to Captain Kidd, Avery, and Blackbeard. Here is the title of this book which is printed in bold type.

THE GRAND PYRATE: or the Life and Death of Capt. **GEORGE CUSACK.** The great Sea-Robber. with an Accompt of all his notorious Robberies both at Sea and Land. Together with his Tryal, Condemnation, and Execution. Taken by an Impartial Hand. London. Printed for Jonathan Edwin at the Sign of the Three Roses in Ludgate-street.
M.D.C.L.XXVI.

My search for books about pirates led me to the back premises of the booksellers rather than to the front shop where the more respectable books are lodged, and much pirate treasure trove was unearthed on the top shelves which were labelled "Crime." Crime, pure and simple, does not appeal to me, but I always examined any small booklet I came across about highwaymen and once began, in a desultory sort of way, to collect them. But after I had secured some thirty or more of these lives of highwaymen I gave it up. I found that highwaymen lacked variety or originality, one was so much like another. They all started in life with poor but honest parents, got into bad company, then into debt, took to picking pockets, and then in order to make bigger money quickly and easily, they "took to the road." Before very long they were sure to be caught and imprisoned, tried, and then hanged. These little books claim to be the dying speeches and last words of the repen-

tant sinners. Actually, they were composed by the prison chaplain, whose perquisite it was to write, and then sell them to the mob at the foot of the gallows. Probably the blissful state of penitence in which every malefactor acknowledged his misdeeds and met his fate was an invention of the clerical author to act as an example and warning to others. Not all the title-pages of these pamphlets are as full of information as this one:

A Genuine NARRATIVE of the Memorable LIFE and ACTIONS of JOHN EVERETT, who formerly kept the Cock Ale-House in the Old Bailey; and lately the Tap in Fleet Prison, and was Executed at Tyburn, on Friday the 20th day of February, 1729-30 . . . To which is added, His Humble Address (by way of Letter) to Mrs. Martha Ellis and Mrs. Manley, whom he Robb'd, and for which he was Condemn'd. And likewise his Letter to his Brother's Master, a Chair-Maker, etc. etc.

Written by Himself when under Condemnation, and in his Cell in Newgate, and Publish'd at his own Request.
London: Printed and sold by John Applebee, in Black-Fryers.

MDCCXXX

(Price Six-Pence)

A very notorious highwayman and one popular with the ladies was John Rann, or "Sixteen-string Jack" as he was known. He had his good qualities, for we learn that "his character was, in general, that of a free and generous disposition; always ready to assist his associates, or any former acquaintance, who might at any time stand in need of support," and that "he was naturally a person of great courage and resolution." His downfall was attributed to self-indulgence: "his principal misfortune was that of being too much given to liquor, for in these intervals he would

not only boast of those transactions, but quarrel with any person in the slightest provocation." No doubt the chaplain made good use of this as a text for his sermon in the prison chapel which preceded the solemn procession to the gallows at Tyburn. Here is the title-page to his "Life":

A Genuine Account of the LIFE OF JOHN RANN, Alias Sixteen-String Jack; who was executed November 30th, 1774 for a Robbery on the Highway, near Brentford; containing His Adventures and Enterprises, his numerous Escapes from Justice, and his Amours with several Ladies. Among which is introduced some curious Anecdotes and MISS SMITH and MISS ROCHE, his favourite DULCINEAS, To which is added some Strictures on the PENAL LAWS, and a particular Account of Lane and Trotman, executed at the same Time for the barbarous Robbery of Mr. Floyd, in a coach, near Chelsea.

.

By these sad Tales,
Virtue is our strong Defence,
From Vice, the undermining Foe;
True Happiness is only thence,
Each british Youth should learn to know.

Who could object to being charged sixpence for such a book?

There is one department of a country-house library which has always seemed to me to be sadly neglected. It is the bedside books, the odd assortment which ornament, for they do little else, the average guest room in a country house. How well we all know that feeling of depression and disappointment which comes over us on reading

through the titles of the books we find placed upon the little table beside the bed when we arrive at a country house. There are about a dozen of them lying at an angle of forty-five degrees in a kind of pig-trough. They prove to be the very off-scouring of the library downstairs, books considered by our hosts to be good enough or bad enough for the spare room. One glance is sufficient. I know what the answer to this will be. That no other than a fool travels abroad without taking a good book or two with him. To this I would reply, "Do you, sir or madam, when you visit your friends take with you your own food?" Of course you don't, unless you are such a sad dyspeptic that you can only digest some noxious pre-digested synthetic abomination made by a chemist, and if you are in such a bad way, then you are not fit to leave your own home. However good his food at home may be, however accomplished his cook, the intending visitor looks forward with pleasure to the change of diet, for the food and wine will be different from those to which he is accustomed at home. So it is with books. However many books you may have in your own house you expect to find different ones, both good and interesting, which you have never read, in the houses of your friends. One of the delights of someone else's library is the first meeting with new books and new authors. Even in those rare houses where books that *are* books are provided in the bedrooms, I have noticed in the cases where I have been invited a second or even a third time that the same books were still by the bedside that were there on my previous visit. Books in the spare room should be constantly changed and not left there year after year.

If I may, I should like to suggest a few rules for the choice of books for the spare bedroom. First of all there is the size of the book. It must not be too big or too heavy to hold with comfort. The type should be good and clear. The contents must not be too exciting, nor the stories

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too long. Either tends to repel sleep. But at the same time the bedside book must not be selected for its soporific qualities. Books of short stories, essays, poetry, are suitable, as they can be closed at any moment when the reader wishes to go to sleep. Now it would be presumptuous for one person to offer to another advice about the books to place in his guest's room, but I am giving three lists of the books which I find are at the moment in the three spare bedrooms at Crossbows. I do not expect any reader to agree with any one of these lists, but they will show, I hope, that we, as hosts, take some trouble and forethought over this all-too-neglected department of hospitality.

First Guest Room

Masters: "Spoon River Anthology."

Evans: "On Foot in Sussex."

Menken: "Americana."

Hudson: "Hampshire Days."

Saki: "Reginald in Russia."

Eha: "Behind the Bungalow."

Larwood and Hotton: "History of Signboards."

Montague: Essays.

The Week-End Book.

"Whitaker's Almanack."

Second Guest Room

Conan Doyle: "Through the Open Door."

Gilbert: "Bab Ballads."

"Secret Remedies."

Eha: "Tribes on my Frontier."

O. Henry: "Short Stories."

Gosse: "Pirates' Who's Who."

Cobbett: "Rural Rides."

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Duff: "Handbook of Hanging."
Bret Harte: "Luck of Roaring Camp."
Aubrey: "Scandals and Credulities."
Tchekoff: "Select Tales."

Third Guest Room

Turgenev: "A Sportsman's Sketches."
Kingsmill: "Anthology of Inveective and Abuse."
Hakluyt: "Everyman" Edition.
Squire: "Songs from the Elizabethans."
Eha: "Naturalist on the Prowl."
Moritz: "Travels in England."
Beachcomber: "Stuff and Nonsense."
Hudson: "Nature in Downland."
de la Mare: "Desert Islands."

The last book on this list is, I admit, a little large for bed reading, but it is so delightful to read that it cannot be excluded. I am painfully aware that many of the books in the above lists will not meet with the approval of all or perhaps any of my readers.

There is nothing in the world more personal than the choice of a book. I once travelled with a friend by car to Monte Carlo and back. This was the late Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, and he read the same book in bed throughout the trip. He was a man with a hundred interests in life, and had been a pioneer in motor-cars. But there was no subject he was more interested in than locomotives and railways, and when a young man he had worked in the shops of the South-Western Railway, and had often driven the engines of passenger trains. He had one bedside book, and one only. It never altered except when a new edition was published, which he immediately purchased. It was "Bradshaw's Railway Guide." Over this stupendous

compilation, a work entirely unintelligible to me, Lord Montagu used to pore by the hour. To test his knowledge I would set him problems. I might say I wished to travel from Blue Anchor in Somerset to Bonar Bridge in Ross-shire, and without a moment's hesitation he would give me the hour at which the train left Blue Anchor, when and where I should change trains, and the exact time of arrival at my destination in Scotland. This, of course, is an extreme case, and I would not dream of placing a railway time-table by the bedside of a guest unless I was positive that he was a keen student of siderodromology. To a guest who was not wrapped up in the subject of railway travel the presence of a time-table in his bedroom might be misunderstood and taken amiss.

CHAPTER X

FOR those country dwellers who can afford it and who are not bound by home ties of any sort, there is always foreign travel with which to pass the worst period of the winter. For those who like that sort of thing there is the "luxury liner," which visits various places, at each of which it disgorges its hundreds of passengers for a few hours' sight-seeing, and then re-embarks them to hurry on to the next place of call. But this is not travelling at all. The only memory the traveller retains of each country visited will be a lunch at a big hotel—one exactly like every other big hotel in the world—and a frantic drive in a motor-car. Before he returns on board he will just have time to send a few picture post cards to his friends at home and add a few objects to his collection of souvenirs. When going abroad in the winter the essential thing is to be sure to go far enough south. Nothing can be more cold and miserable than the Riviera at its worst, and even such places so far south as Tangier can be wet and cold in January and February. For guaranteed sunshine, real hot sunshine every day, the West Indies cannot be beaten. Take a ship, for example, to Trinidad. Stop there a while—the whole island can be thoroughly explored in a fortnight. Trinidad is the genuine tropic isle of the story books, dense forests, with ropes of liana drooping from the tree tops, marvellous climbing plants with leaves of every shape, and gorgeous flowering trees, such as the flame-coloured Immortel, the saffron-yellow Poui, and the blue Lignum Vitæ. There are huge butterflies and slow-flying moths of brilliant colours, and gorgeous humming-birds and the familiar and cheeky tyrant-bird, known as the "Qu'est-ce qu'il dit" from his

persistent call, who comes to the balcony each morning to share your breakfast. See everything you can except the pitch lake—this dreary horror is the only eyesore in that lovely land, and the only thing the passengers on a luxury liner are allowed to see. Then take the little steamer which plies twice a week between Port of Spain and Scarborough, the absurd capital of Tobago, one of the few West Indian islands which remain unspoiled, and where you can still get an impression of what the West Indies were like a hundred years ago. In a quite different way Jamaica too is exquisite. It is more sophisticated and has more land under cultivation than Trinidad, but by keeping well away from Kingston and from the "grand hotels" and by staying only at those private houses where guests are received, the visitor gets some real insight into Jamaican life and Jamaican cooking and hospitality.

The house where we were recommended to stay when we first arrived at Jamaica nestled comfortably at the foot of the Blue Mountains, a few miles away from the hot and noisy city of Kingston. The one-storied bungalow, cooled by deep, shady verandas, stood in a lovely garden, full of tropical shrubs and flowers, and here it was possible to get some idea of colonial life and an opportunity to sample Jamaican food.

Mayfield was owned and managed by a charming Jamaican lady, assisted by smiling negro servants. Here was no crowded lounge or noisy cocktail bar. After an excellent dinner you could sit in peace in the veranda and enjoy a fairy cabaret, where fire-flies danced to an orchestra of whistling tree-frogs and cicadas.

Our first Jamaican dinner was a successful culinary adventure which included many island dishes new to us. The meal began with Jamaican pepper pot, a dish renowned throughout the West Indies, and one spoken of with respect and admiration in "Tom Cringle's Log," as

well as in many other old books about the early days in Jamaica. This was followed in turn by a fish called daker snapper, squash in cream sauce, and baked yampey. By way of a sweet we were given fresh stewed guavas with coco-nut cream. This feast for the gods ended with locally grown coffee and a Jamaican cigar.

It was not long before we had made friends with a member of the household who, though both black and white, was by no means the least important resident at Mayfield. This was Spats, a dog of engaging manners if of doubtful pedigree. His short coat was black, his tail long and thin, while his paws were white, from which last characteristic he got, no doubt, his name. Spats was like one of those millionaire masters of industry who, in spite of every disadvantage of birth, education, and upbringing, eventually becomes prosperous, respected, and happy. As in nearly all cases of the self-made, Spats had gone through early difficulties and struggles. This we learned from our hostess when we asked her to tell us his story.

Originally, she informed us, Spats had belonged to some negroes who lived in a neighbouring cabin, and who cruelly treated, beat, and starved him. Gradually the poor wretch took to visiting Mayfield in search of an occasional kind word or bone, but in time his visits became so frequent as to be an annoyance. When driven away from the veranda by threats, or even an occasional stick, he would be found a moment later in the kitchen currying favour with the cook.

Up to this time any charming qualities of Spats had not come to be appreciated and he was regarded and treated merely as a pariah dog. At length his visits became so repeated and so unbearable that ruthless measures were decided upon to get rid of him once and for all. One fateful morning Stanley, the coloured house-boy, was ordered to take the dog to the lethal chamber at Kingston, and there

have him painlessly and utterly destroyed. Together the two set off, Stanley with a shilling in one hand, the fee for the humane operation, and a cord attached to the victim's neck in the other.

As Stanley and the dog disappeared out of the garden gate, the ladies of Mayfield gave a sigh of relief to see the last of the persistent intruder. That same evening, just when the household was about to sit down to dinner, a noise was heard outside, and in bounded Spats, all doggish smiles and wagging tail. But Spats came back alone, without Stanley. Next day came and went and still no Stanley. Days, weeks, and months passed by, but Stanley was never seen or heard of again.

We may be truly thankful that the golden gift of speech has been denied the so-called lower animals, but if an exception could be made, it should be in the case of Spats, so that he might solve the mystery and tell us exactly what happened that day after he and Stanley left to go together to the lethal chamber.

It is needless to add that Spats is now at Mayfield for life, an honoured guest and a beloved member of the family.

One of the glories for which Jamaica is famous is the sea-bathing. The sea is warm and clear as crystal, and when not in the water you bask on sandy beaches. For one whole week we stopped at the Doctor's Cave Hotel at Montego Bay, to do nothing else but bathe. We had an orgy of sea-bathing. No one did anything else but bathe at Montego Bay; as a matter of fact there was little else there to do. So hot were the days, in February, that we did not attempt to explore the hills around until late in the afternoon when the temperature had begun to drop. It was when we returned to the hotel from one of these rambles that we were surprised to see our acquaintance, Mr. Harrison, seated beside his baggage. Only the previous evening he had talked to us and said nothing about his

leaving, in fact we understood he intended to remain at the Doctor's Cave Hotel for some weeks longer. We were surprised and sorry at his going and hoped that his sudden departure was not due to any bad news from home. In reply, he invited us to sit down while he explained to us exactly what had happened to cut short his visit, for the station bus was not due to call for him for another ten minutes.

He told us, what we already knew, that he had been staying at Montego Bay for several weeks and intended to remain there until the weather become too hot, when he would return to the States. Owing to something which had happened the night before, he was leaving at once, to embark at Kingston on the first steamer bound for New York.

During his visit he had not made many friends, nor mixed much with the other hotel guests. But he had made two friends, both ladies, both young, and both, in their different ways, charming. One of these he used to meet every morning on the beach, and after bathing they used to sit and talk until it was time to return to the hotel for lunch. He did not know the lady's name nor where she was stopping; probably she stayed at one of the hotels on the hill above the town, for he never saw her except on the beach in the mornings, where she was much admired for her swimming, her elegant figure, and her very original bathing costumes.

His other lady friend, also charming, and also, but in quite another way, good-looking, was staying at the Doctor's Cave Hotel, and gradually she and Mr. Harrison got into the habit of meeting an hour before dinner, to sit and chat while they drank their rum-punch. On the previous evening, while they were sitting together as usual and talking, Mr. Harrison happened to say how surprised he was that she never bathed. The bathing at Montego Bay, he

pointed out, was famous, not only in Jamaica but the world over, and he tried to persuade her to come and bathe with him one morning. In answer to this the lady, after looking hard at him for a few minutes, protested in an injured voice, "But I *do* bathe, *every* day. I bathed with you this very morning and sat with you for more than an hour afterwards on the beach!"

"So you see," concluded Mr. Harrison, "there is nothing else for me except to leave, but," he added, turning to my wife, "why and how do women manage to look so utterly different in evening dress and bathing suits?"

While we were stopping at Montego Bay I fell to a temptation which I can seldom if ever resist when in the tropics. Though not by any stretch of the imagination can I be described as a "dressy" man, I have an uncontrollable craving for tropical suits. One point in favour of these light and airy garments is their cheapness, and another the rapidity with which they are made. In Bombay you can walk into the shop of any Indian tailor at ten o'clock in the morning, choose your cloth and be measured for a suit, try it on after lunch and the finished article is all ready to wear by six o'clock the same evening. How different this is from your Savile Row tailor, and so also is the price. The son of the manageress of the Doctor's Cave Hotel, himself a particularly well-dressed young man, recommended me to get a suit made of Jamaica flannel by a tailor of the name of Minto. This so-called Jamaica flannel is not flannel at all, or anything like it. It is the material from which sacks are made, and is of rough, loosely woven texture, bleached almost white and will "make-up" into a very presentable and cool garment. So off I went to interview Mr. Minto, whose premises were in Harbour Street, a narrow alley in the town. After the dazzling glare of the open street I was at first blinded when I entered the door of the shop, but as my eyes adapted themselves to the sudden change, I became

aware that there were a great number of people in the place. Besides Mr. Minto, who was as black a negro as you could wish to see, there were his assistants, while on the other side of the room was a group of boot- and shoe-makers, who all laid down their tools to watch the interesting spectacle of a new client being measured. In addition there were several nanny-goats with their kids, and of course the usual litter of small negro children and babies. The smiling Mr. Minto and I at once agreed on the price of a complete suit, and in no time the necessary measurements had been taken. I tried it on the same evening and it was ready to wear the following morning. Of course I had to put it on at once and go to show it and myself off to the manageress's son. After approving both of the material and the cut, he inquired what I had been charged for the suit. When I told him I had paid sixteen shillings for it he was horrified and protested that the price was exorbitant, and said that if only I had beaten the tailor down I could have got it for considerably less. But how, I ask, can you bargain with a tailor about his price when he charges only sixteen shillings to make you a suit? When I was next visiting my tailor in Hanover Square, I recounted this incident to him, but he did not seem to be amused or wish to hear any more about it. Nor was the hint taken, for his bill for the next suit he made for me, which took a fortnight to complete, was no nearer in price to Mr. Minto's sixteen shillings than his former suits had been.

The good ship *Careena* which brought us home from Jamaica carried, besides passengers, thousands upon thousands of bunches of green Jamaica bananas. We sailed from Kingston at night, and as the twinkling lights of the port and city fell astern, the vast mysterious form of the Blue Mountain rose up high into the brilliant tropic moonlight. Next morning the Caribbean Sea was smooth as glass, for once the usual trade wind had ceased to blow. A

slight haze blurred but did not obscure the view of distant objects. Suddenly through the light sea mist there appeared before us a great dark mass, which on referring to the chart which hung in the companion-way could be no other than the mountains of Haiti. So at last I had seen with my own eyes the romantic island of Hispaniola!

Hispaniola! Visions of the buccaneers, of Sir Henry Morgan, the plunderer of golden Panama, of Exquemeling, the barber-surgeon historian of the "Brothers of the Coast," of bloody Rock Braziliano, of that cruel madman Francis L'Ollonais. . . . Hispaniola! Spanish hidalgos, pieces of eight, pirates, the Spanish Main, silver doubloons!

As the ship drew nearer to the land, we could make out the channel we were steering for, which runs between Hispaniola on the right and Cuba on the left. So excited did I become at being so close to Hispaniola that I felt I must share my rapture with others or blow up. Close to where I stood on the fore part of the upper deck there were seated, with their backs turned to the Island of Romance, a retired Anglo-Indian colonel, his wife, and daughter. Each was wearing a large *sola topee*, although the rest of the passengers wore no hats at all. Each was intently reading a work of the late Edgar Wallace. By now the ship was so close to the island that the breakers could be seen hurtling themselves into white spray against the wet black rocks. I could not bear to let my fellow-travellers miss this unique sight, which they probably would never have another chance of seeing. So, approaching them, I said, "Colonel and Mrs. Stringer, do look behind you, we are close to the island of Hispaniola." The three readers laid their Edgar Wallaces open on their knees, and the colonel asked me this surprising question, "Is it a British possession?" I had to confess it was not, and the colonel and his ladies returned to their books. So I slunk away, ashamed of my un-British excitability, to hide myself from the sight of the military

family, where I could gaze at Hispaniola until the sea mist swallowed it up.

This crushing episode called to my mind, in the inconsequential way these things happen, an American gentleman I once met at an hotel in Venice. Somehow or other he mentioned South America, and that he had once crossed the Andes by the railway which runs, or climbs rather, from the town of Mendoza at the foothills on the Argentine side of the range, up to the pass of Uspallata, and then drops suddenly down to the enchanting Chilean town of San Felipe de los Andes. When I was there more than thirty years ago the railway had only reached a place called Punta de las Vacas, some ten thousand feet up, where travellers continued their journey over the pass on muleback to join the Chilean terminus on the other side. The scenery throughout is miraculous beyond belief. I asked my American acquaintance what he thought of the astounding views to be seen from the railway carriage windows as he crossed the great range of mountains. His reply was that he had played bridge during the whole journey and so had not had time to look at any views. Foreign travel is wasted on such people as the American bridge player and the Anglo-Indian colonel; in fact, one wonders why they should bother to travel at all.

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH I am all in favour of the country life, it must in all honesty be confessed that it has one drawback. The older the country house the more liable is it to become the resort of rats. At first we had no rats at Crossbows. They began with us in quite a small way, like many flourishing industrial or financial concerns. When one day the cook casually remarked to my wife that she had strong suspicions of the presence of a rat in the larder, little did we suspect what was in store for us. This seemingly trivial event was duly reported to me, not so much because of my position—technically—as head of the household, but because in the late and Great War I had held the unique rank of G.O.C. Rats to the Second Army in France. I promised something should be done about this rat which had dared to invade the residence of the late G.O.C. and of course forgot all about it. But that one lone rat was to prove to be the small cloud no bigger than a man's hand.

The next warning came a few days later from one of the maids, who complained of loud scamperings and squeakings above the ceiling of her bedroom which kept her from sleeping. This time I said something really must be done about it, and I bought two wooden break-back traps, which I baited and set with great cunning in two likely places. By the end of the week one baby rat, small and innocent, was all the late G.O.C. had to show. Then things began to happen. At nights we were awakened and kept awake by loud noises in the roof. Not mere scampering but galloping hither and thither. Apparently, to judge from the racket, parties or packs of large, heavy-footed animals were running races above our heads. At last the thing got

beyond all bearing and the late G.O.C. Rats took the matter seriously in hand. I began by calling to mind the things I used to tell my audiences at the rat-catching lectures I delivered at Hazebrouck. My slogan had been "No Food, No Rats": so I began to inspect. A surprise visit to the scullery at night after the staff had retired told its tale. On suddenly switching on the electric light what a sight I beheld, six monster rats seated in a row on the window ledge! One of them at once swarmed up a water-pipe and disappeared through a hole in the roof, while the others hid behind jam-pots and basins, where I could see them peeping round at me. In the meanwhile more rats came rushing out of the larder, the wood cupboard and the pantry, and out of an open tub beneath the sink, and these also swarmed with extraordinary agility up the pipes to the black cave which communicates with the unexplored roof of the oldest part of the house. Two rats darted toward the outlet pipe of the sink and fought savagely and pushed against each other to be the first to escape out of doors by that exit. On flashing my electric torch up into the cave in the roof I saw reflected pairs of small bright eyes, some green, some red, of rats which from this safe and dark retreat were watching the fun. . . .

"No Food, No Rats." After this all scraps of food, vegetables, or other eatables were carefully removed or guarded from the rats. I bought a lot more traps of various types, which I set here and there. Not one rat was caught, but they increased in numbers and made more noise than ever in the roof and became much bolder.

The next move was to start blocking up all the rat-holes I could find with strong concrete reinforced by wire netting. More rats in the roof, and new holes in the floorboards.

The rodents now began to gnaw through the thickest woodwork and kept it up all night long, and also, to judge by the uproar which went on as we lay awake in bed, to

move furniture about in the attics. My family would look reproachfully towards me at breakfast when our guests began recounting their experiences during the previous night. By mutual consent we refrained from inquiring of them if they had slept well or had passed a good night, for all too well we knew what their answer would be. New guests who did not know about our rats would begin at breakfast, "I believe Crossbows is haunted," and then proceed to tell us about the strange sounds they had heard in the night. To stop this I would hurry to remark that Crossbows had always been haunted, but that we made a point of never mentioning the fact because of the servants, and I would change the subject into other channels.

But all the while, lurking somewhere in the hidden recesses of my mind, was the alarming thought that perhaps these rats were really the ghosts of the rats I had slaughtered in the war and were come to haunt me. However, before resorting to witchcraft, exhortations, or magic I resolved to try other means to rid the house of its unwelcome invaders. By this time I was on my mettle, my reputation as a rat-catcher was at stake. So I consulted with Mr. Smart, the chemist at Steyning, and on his recommendation purchased and put down some poisonous tablets which he assured me were lethal to rats and yet harmless to human beings. These tablets were large and bright green in colour and on each was printed in bold embossed letters the word POISON. Whether it was this stupid, thoughtless warning, or the virulent colour, I do not know, but the rats left Mr. Bright's deadly tablets severely alone.

It was about this time that I came to hear of TACK. This seemed just the very thing needed to outwit our plague. Traps had failed, so had starvation, and so had the poison tablets. TACK was sure to do the trick. It is sold in large collapsible tubes like tooth-paste with instructions to open the end of the tube and squeeze out the TACK on to a piece of

thick brown paper. Then you folded up the paper and pressed it to spread the TACK, separated the folded halves, and there you were. All you did then, according to the printed instructions supplied with each tube, was to lay the sticky paper "butter side up" in the paths or tracks frequented by the rats. TACK is a kind of bird-lime of enormously adhesive power. A rat has only to put one paw in the TACK and he will never get free. I prepared several snares of this remarkable rat-lime and set them in places in the scullery that I knew the rats frequented.

Early the next morning I arose to collect the sticky papers and the entrapped rats before the household was about. I was not quite early enough, already both Gladys, the kitchen-maid, and Hawkins, the dog, had been caught, but not one rat. This was disappointing, but I was determined not to be beaten by a lot of common house rats.

We next explored the dark recesses of the roof itself, and discovered several rats' nests made of straw and pieces of paper. In a hole in the wall behind the bath in the children's bathroom we found a comfortable cradle for baby rats, made out of three pairs of our baby's socks, one of her leggings, and a face towel. This stealing of Jennifer's socks was all the more remarkable because the theft took place on Christmas Eve, probably at the very hour when the children's socks and our own stockings were being hung up, stuffed with small gifts, to be discovered on waking on Christmas morning. The whole of the loft we freely sprinkled with strong disinfectant powder. I chuckled to myself to think how the rats would dislike that! No food, all holes cemented up, poison tablets at every turn, sticky TACK everywhere, and now disinfectant. I would show them who was their master. That night was the worst of all. Noises of iron-shod ponies galloping up and down over our heads, banging of heavy weights, went on all night to the accompaniment of an all-pervading stench of disinfectant.

After breakfast the following morning, as I sat in my own room alone with my thoughts and despair in my heart, Harris brought a message to say a man had called at the back door to inquire if we had any rats. "Have any rats!" I cried as I hurried out to welcome this most providential visitor. I found, standing by a motor-cycle, a tall, grave, clean-shaven man, who introduced himself as John Wilson, of Horley. He came, he said, at the request of our friend and near neighbour, Christopher Stone. Here then was our saviour. On his inquiring if we had any rats we wanted destroyed, I assured him indeed we had. His terms were two guineas a treatment—poets and professional men are always paid in guineas, only tradesmen in pounds, and as he guaranteed to rid us of all our rats at one application I closed with his offer. Any doubts I might have had about his ability to kill rats were swept aside after reading several testimonials he showed me from gratified clients. One of these was from a farmer who stated that he had employed Mr. Wilson to rid his farm of a plague of rabbits, and so great was his success that the dead rabbits had to be removed in cartloads. It was not until later on that it occurred to me how odd it was that all of Mr. Wilson's testimonials were written in exactly the same handwriting.

His method was to lay down under floorboards and in other rat-ridden places his own secret powder. We were made to promise not to lift the floorboards for three days and then we were to remove all the corpses and burn them. The expert, assisted by Harris, then got to work. When he opened the bag which was strapped to the carrier on his bicycle, I noticed in it a tin with a blue-and-white label. I tried to read the name on it for future use—but Mr. Wilson was too quick for me, and nimbly snatched it out of the bag and put it in his pocket. Then he and Harris went about pulling up boards in the scullery and sprinkling the secret powder, then up into the dark recesses of the roof, where

more of the deadly poison was spread about. When Mr. Wilson had finished his task I handed him his fee and thanked him. He had taken a great weight and responsibility off my shoulders.

As he was on the point of leaving, Mr. Wilson told me that one treatment of his secret powder almost always was sufficient, but if a week later we had a solitary rat in the house, I was to let him know and he would carry out another treatment free of charge.

It called for considerable resolution and strength of mind to resist the temptation during the following three days to take a peep beneath the boards to see how many dead rats were lying there. But we did resist it, and not until the three days were up did we look. First the floorboards in the scullery were lifted and, lo and behold, no rats, although all traces of the lethal powder had disappeared. No doubt the rats had climbed up to the roof to die in company together. So Harris was dispatched up a ladder armed with a torch and a sack, the latter to bring away the dead rats in. Twenty minutes later Harris returned and reported not one dead rat was to be seen. But he had not returned altogether empty-handed. With justifiable pride he produced from his pocket the identical tin we had seen in Mr. Wilson's bag, which contained the secret poison, and which he had been so careful to hide from us. Harris had found it beneath an old piece of sacking where the rat-catcher had evidently hidden it. Now we should learn what the poison was. This is what was printed on the label:

Dr. Maclean's Stomach Powder.

Directions.

To be taken after meals with milk or water. This powder is perfectly harmless and should be taken regularly for 3 or 4 weeks.

So much for Mr. Wilson and my two guineas.

Dr. Maclean's excellent stomach powder seemed to do the rats a world of good, for they galloped, squeaked, and romped louder than ever before.

My own position in the house became after this more uncomfortable than ever. For some reason which I could not fathom I came to be considered by my family to be in some mysterious way responsible for the rat nuisance. Whenever the subject of rats cropped up, which it continually did, my wife would look reproachfully at me as though I were the guilty party. So, I imagine, must Countess Szyssetz have looked at her husband on reading in the morning paper of fresh havoc caused by the musk rats descended from the pair which the Count first introduced into Europe. They had spread and multiplied with alarming rapidity, destroying railway embankments, damming rivers and breaking down canal banks all over Hungary. But *I* had not introduced the cursed rats to Crossbows.

Bitter, indeed humiliating, as had been the disappointment of Mr. Wilson's method, I was determined not to give up. I wrote a letter telling the rat-catcher about the disappointing results of his first treatment and begging him to come quickly to complete his work. Some days later my letter was returned to me marked, "Not known at this address."

The moment a new rat-hole appeared it was promptly cemented up. A new poison was tried, a secret one of course, and guaranteed to be absolutely infallible. It had to be mixed up with a pound of the best raw beef, two bloaters, and half a pound of the best English butter. I placed this tempting mixture in the scullery, and next morning not a trace of it was left. The stupid rats had eaten every crumb of it. And not one rat died!

Many a man in such a position would have given up, admitted himself beaten, and sold his house and gone else-

where. But I am not like that. There must be no going back, my honour was at stake, and so was the very structure of our house. After further consultation with Mr. Smart, I bought from him a tin of "Radine," another infallible cure for rats. The very label seemed to give encouragement and hope by urging the rat-ridden householder to "Make a Clean Sweep of your Rats." I liked, too, the encouraging slogans: "Fascinating and Fatal"; "Devastating and Decisive." They seemed to ensure success. Amongst the directions for using "Radine" was one sinister warning, "When in use keep locked up all children, poultry, pigs, and other domestic animals." When I opened the tin I found this fascinating and fatal preparation had the appearance of caviare. Following the directions faithfully I spread the caviare thickly on slices of bread and butter and nailed each slice to a board, to prevent—I suppose—the rats from carrying them upstairs to eat in bed. In spite of the advertisers' boasting I had not really great faith in "Radine"; I seemed to have heard the same sort of thing before. But at last something had been found which our rats liked but did not thrive upon. Nothing spectacular happened, no sudden "clean sweeps," but gradually our rat population grew less and less, though few corpses were found. Hawkins, whose one and only ambition in life is to catch a rat, at last caught several, though I have little doubt that the rats he caught were suffering from the effects of "Radine."

When I suggested a little way back that our swarm of rats might be the ghosts of Flemish trench rats come to haunt their late enemy the "G.O.C. Rats," it was done in no spirit of fancy. We have ghosts at Crossbows; one was here when we arrived. It is only seen in the bathroom, and only by bathers when reclining in the bath. It is a small and lively house-mouse which sometimes appears from nowhere in the middle of the floor. After running about

for a little while it will disappear, not suddenly as it came, but gradually fading away from sight until it is no longer there. This ghost mouse has been seen on many occasions and there is no question whatever about its being a ghost, for what else could it be?

Our only other ghost is an equally unusual one. He, or she—we never have been able to discover its sex, if indeed ghosts have sex—tramps round the house at night in heavy rubber boots. When first we heard the steady shuffling noise we thought, naturally, that somebody was walking round the house and peered rather agitatedly from behind the curtains to try to see who the nocturnal trespasser could be. Generally it is heard on pitch-dark nights, but not always, for on one summer night when there was a harvest moon which lighted up the garden almost as clearly as in the daytime, we heard it shuffling along on the stone pavement below. Hurrying to the open window we craned our necks to see at last who the mysterious intruder was. But nothing at all was to be seen; all was peace and quiet except for the sound of the steady clump-clump, made by a pair of heavy rubber boots, which passed exactly beneath us. Gradually the noise became fainter as the invisible being in the invisible boots trudged off round the corner of the house until the sound faded away into the distance. At first, to be quite honest, we were thoroughly scared by our nocturnal walker, but such is the adaptability of the human species that now, whenever we hear it going its rounds outside in the dark, one of us will casually remark to the other "There goes old shuffle-boots" and we continue to read our books, or turn over to go to sleep again.

CHAPTER XII

I FEEL safe in assuming that no reader will question the axiom that no home is complete without a pet. Does not Robert Louis Stevenson speak somewhere of "Happy homes and hairy faces"? A home without books and pets can never be a real home. One of the blessings of retirement is the time and opportunity it gives for reading books and keeping pets. But here again, in this important matter of pets, discretion must be used. It is essential that the beginner should start with the right sort of pets. Not that I, nor anybody else, is able to tell Miss B or Colonel C exactly what pets she or he should keep or should not keep. There are certain pets which for obvious reasons are best avoided, except by experts, such as poisonous snakes, skunks, large alligators, or gorillas. Nothing is more dependent upon personal idiosyncrasy than the choice of a pet, unless it be the choice of a wife.

Miss B may cherish a parrot or find solace in a tortoise, while Colonel C may dislike both and care only for the company of dogs. Like so many other important things in life, the choice of the right pet can only be achieved by experience and experiment.

It is with the object of saving my reader's time, temper, and money that I, a lifelong keeper of pets, offer the following few hints to the inexperienced beginner.

First of all, start in a small way. You may not, for all you know, have the gift or knack of keeping pets, so until this is ascertained, it will be best to embark on something cheap and easy to manage, like fancy mice or goldfish. But in all probability you have long ago passed this prentice stage and are ready and qualified for more exciting and exotic charges.

Pets may be divided into the usual and the unusual. Amongst the unusual was one my mother kept when she was a little girl, and as in the case of so many pets—most, alas!—this one ended its life tragically. This pet was an ordinary but handsome blue-bottle fly. Years and years ago, before the Japanese went “Woolworth,” they used to make exquisite toys by hand. One was a minute bird-cage, not more than a few inches in size. Strong grasses formed the bars of the cage, which had a little door which could be opened and closed. It was supposed that these dainty little cages were used by the Japanese to imprison grasshoppers. Poor grasshoppers, little space had they for hopping exercise. My mother bought one of these little cages at some bazaar in London, and began to look about for a suitable inmate for it. At last her eye fell upon a blue-bottle fly. The insect took well to confinement and thrived on a diet of Demerara sugar, and seemed to be both healthy and happy. Then came a day when my mother was invited to pay a short visit to some relations in Kent. Of course she intended the blue-bottle should go with her; it would benefit, she thought, by the change of air, and in any case she did not wish to be parted from her pet.

But stern parents and nurse absolutely forbade her to take the insect away with her, and so with tears and many endearments she said farewell to her dear blow-fly. Fearing to trust her treasure to the servants, my mother, before she left home, placed in the cage enough sugar to last the blue-bottle the whole time she would be away, so that there might be no risk whatever that it should go hungry. A few days later when she returned home, my mother's first act was to rush upstairs to the nursery to greet her dear pet. Imagine her feelings and her tears when on looking into the cage she beheld her darling lying prone upon his back, stiff, swollen, and dead. Had the faithful insect died of grief at being parted from his little mistress? No, he had died from

a surfeit of sugar, having greedily eaten up all his sugar ration at one meal on the first day.

More than one lesson might be learned from this story of the captive fly. One will suffice. The lives of all pets end in tragedy, and on this point I shall have more to say farther on. For the moment it will be enough to quote one other example of an unusual cage-pet, because it teaches us another lesson and also is a good example of the extraordinary adaptability of animals to a change of environment. I cannot vouch for the story from personal experience, but as it was told to me by a high official of the Zoological Gardens at Regent's Park, I see no reason to doubt its veracity. Once a man who was fond of aquariums kept an eel. For several years this eel—it was a common English freshwater eel—lived in a glass tank. It grew in time to recognize its master and took pieces of meat or earth-worms from his hand. One day, owing to some accident—the details of which I do not remember now—the tank in which the eel lived became cracked and most, but not quite all, of the water escaped. When the owner discovered this, there was less than an inch of water in the bottom of the tank, but the eel appeared to be in no way inconvenienced by it. Then it was that the idea occurred to the owner, who was a man of original mind and fond of making experiments, to try to discover how small a quantity of water would suffice to keep his eel alive. Every day he withdrew a cupful of water from the tank, and the eel showed no signs or symptoms of distress. This he continued to do until one day he had drained away the last drop of water from the tank, and still the eel seemed not to mind or to suffer, but continued well and apparently quite happy at the bottom of the tank. It then occurred to the man that it was foolish to keep a tame eel in a dry aquarium, so he removed the eel and put it into a canary cage, which he hung up in his drawing-room. Besides two perches for

the eel to climb about on there was at one end of the cage a saucer containing the eel's food and on the floor a fair-sized drinking trough of water. The eel settled down at once to the semi-arboreal life of a canary, and was beginning to take to a diet of bird-seed in place of meat when all the hopes of the experimenter were dashed.

One morning when he removed the bandanna handkerchief with which the cage was covered at night to protect the eel from draughts, to his horror he found his eel dead; it had fallen into its drinking fountain and drowned!

Some pets are exacting, some affectionate, some treacherous, others are noisy, smelly, or greedy, while others again may be humble and unassuming. One of the unassuming sort belonged to an old lady who lived quite alone. She had no relatives, no companions, and scarcely a friend in the world. One winter afternoon the vicar called on her, and in the course of a somewhat joyless conversation inquired if the lady was not very lonely with nobody to talk to during the long evenings. "Oh no," replied the recluse as she lifted a cardboard pill-box off the what-not, "you see I have a constant companion." On opening the box there was exposed to the eyes of the vicar nothing more lively than something which looked like a dry bean. The old lady took the small object, which was indeed a bean, out of the box, and laid it gently in the palm of her hand. In silence the lady and the vicar gazed at it, when all of a sudden the dry bean began to roll very slightly to and fro, and then to give little jerks or jumps into the air. This strange proceeding on the part of the bean somewhat alarmed the vicar, who began to suspect his parishioner of being a practitioner of the black arts. Actually, although neither of them knew it, a small parasitic worm had eaten its way into the bean in a larval state, and was lying curled up waiting until certain changes had taken place, when it would emerge as a moth. The warmth of the old lady's

hand excited the worm and made it struggle and so caused the bean to jump about.

The old lady explained to the vicar that whenever she felt lonely and in need of entertainment, all she had to do was to place the bean on the palm of her hand and in a few minutes she felt she was no longer alone but in the company of a friend.

Of all strange and unassuming pets, surely this one of the old lady's takes the palm!

As I look back on a lifetime of pets, I seem to visualize an interminable line of small gravestones, which extends far back to dim childhood's days. There was Lady Pork, the guinea pig, wife of, or anyhow the mother of the children of, Lord Bacon. We took them with us for the summer holidays to a farm near Pulborough. I do not suppose I would remember Lady Pork at all after all these years were it not for something which happened at her funeral. I cannot even remember what she died of, nor if her last illness was long or short, nor if her end was a peaceful one. But I do remember very clearly her funeral. A pathetically small grave was dug in the apple orchard. The mourners consisted of my father and mother, my two sisters, myself, Lord Bacon, and the deceased's own particular friend, Smart, the farmer's sheep-dog.

Smart, being the chief mourner, walked at the head of the slow-moving cortège. After the little coffin had been lowered into the grave, the earth replaced and flowers scattered over the tiny mound, and a small cross erected with this simple inscription:

Lady Pork

We will never forget you,

the mourners returned sadly and silently to the house. None of us children felt inclined for play, our thoughts were

with the dear departed. Then while we sat listlessly about one of my sisters suddenly said, "I wonder where Smart is." In such sad circumstances any excuse is good enough to distract the thoughts of the bereaved, and a search was begun for the missing mourner. At last he was found. He had returned to the orchard, to the newly made grave, and when discovered was in the act of consuming the last portion of his little friend.

The farmer who owned Rodgate farm was named Smale. My father was always muddling up the name of the dog, Smart, with that of his master, which was apt sometimes to lead to odd misunderstandings, as when my father protested to Mrs. Smale saying, "You really must not allow Smale to come into our part of the house, he has just been sick again on the carpet." Nor were matters improved when my father, wishing to make amends for this regrettable contretemps, and seeing Mrs. Smale standing in the garden with some of her friends, raised his hat with a polite bow, and, purposely laying stress on the name, said, "What a lovely day it is, Mrs. Smart."

My own earliest pet, I have been told, was a toad, but more of that anon. Another early one was a Plymouth Rock pullet, which my mother saw in a cage at an animal shop in Shepherd's Bush Green. It looked lonely and unhappy, so out of pity she bought it and carried it home in a brown-paper bag, and how proud I was of it. I kept it in our back-yard and was always feeding it.

I remember, too, a green praying mantis—a species of stick insect—which lived through an English winter. We were returning from a holiday in Switzerland, and while the train was standing in the station at Stalden, I happened to notice a strange green object crawling slowly up a pillar on the platform opposite our carriage. Out I jumped, seized the insect in my pocket-handkerchief, and hopped back with it into the crowded carriage, much to the surprise

of our fellow-travellers. This mantis used to spend a large part of its sedentary life in prayer and meditation, but was always ready to be tempted back to mundane things by the offer of a live mealworm. This he would grasp like a banana in his huge and formidable claws, while he took bites out of the writhing worm, which he munched with signs of evident relish.

Pets in the bedroom. What a splendid subject that would be for the correspondence columns of a newspaper. I wish somebody would start it in *The Times*. It would produce much interesting and unexpected information from readers, for more people keep pets in their bedrooms than most of us realize. There would be those in favour of, and those opposed to, the practice, and there would be letters from readers telling of the strange animals which shared their bedrooms, if not their beds. When the correspondence began to wear a trifle thin, one of the clever leader-writers would write a witty and informative essay summing up the whole subject.

Personally I am not greatly in favour of pets in the bedroom, at least not in mine. Sir Alfred Pease is not, or was not, of the like opinion. I hope I am not being guilty of an indiscretion if I disclose the fact that some thirty years ago, when he and I were in correspondence over a matter concerning a badger, he let slip in one of his letters that he himself kept in his own bedroom, not only badgers, but crocodiles. Now I have never kept a crocodile or even a badger in my bedroom, so I am not in a position to criticize Sir Alfred, but somehow these beasts, one strictly nocturnal, seem scarcely becoming room-mates, except for the most heavy of sleepers.

I happen to be a gluttonous reader of all sorts of books and periodicals. From time to time I receive a newspaper from Newfoundland. It was in one of these that I read an account of a most unusual house pet, and learnt how a

hitherto happy family could be wrecked by thoughtless and selfish indulgence in the passion for keeping strange pets in strange places. It was the report of a lady who had applied for a divorce from her husband on the very unusual plea that he kept a large cat-fish in the only bath in the house. One cannot help feeling that this lady had strong reasons for complaint, but hope that the husband came in time to a proper sense of decency and put away his cat-fish and took back his wife.

Apparently fish are sometimes kept in bed as well as in bathrooms. When the new aquarium at the London Zoo was built and Mr. E. G. Boulenger, who presides over that world-famous exhibition, was collecting material with which to stock his tanks, a gentleman called on him one day carrying in his hand an enormous fish-can. With some pride the stranger opened the lid of the can and disclosed a monster carp. He had come, he told Mr. Boulenger, to present to the Zoological Society his carp, because he felt it was his duty to science and to the public to do so, and that now that he had inspected the aquarium he felt sure his carp would be happy there and be well looked after. He then added the astounding information that this carp had lived in a glass tank in his bedroom for more than twenty years. If I had shared my bedroom with a carp for twenty years I do not think that even Mr. Boulenger could prevail upon me to part with it, not even in the cause of science.

A very different bathroom pet from the hideous whiskered cat-fish or the lumbering carp is what is sometimes lyrically described as "the feathered gem of the avian tribe," the humming-bird. For years these lively little birds from the tropics of America defied all the efforts of European naturalists to acclimatize them. In spite of everything which was done to make them comfortable, happy, and healthy, they seemed to prefer their flower-

decked, sun-drenched forests to cage life on this duller, colder side of the Atlantic. In spite of every care they died. But at last one indefatigable aviculturist, Mr. Alfred Ezra, discovered a way of keeping humming-birds, not only alive, but happy and contented. I hope he will forgive me for disclosing any secrets of his home life. Mr. Ezra brought over from Venezuela several pairs of humming-birds, which he liberated in the bathroom of his house in Park Lane. At last the most difficult problem in bird-keeping was solved, for his humming-birds took at once to the bathroom, and they lived long and happily. Anybody to-day can visit the London Zoo and see there the delightful spectacle of dozens of these tiny birds of all colours and shapes, flitting happily hither and thither in living jungle, basking in the rays of mock sunshine.

Once, long ago when I was a medical student, I had "diggings" in Royal Avenue, Chelsea. My bed-sitting-room was at the front of the house and caught all the sunshine there was. I found it rather lonely, so I thought I would get a pet to keep me company, and bought a pair of quails, which I kept in a large wicker cage in the window. The only objection I could see to them as cage-birds was their habit of scratching their sand and scattering it over the carpet. But my landlady was most unreasonable over my quails, declaring that either they left or I did, and added that although she had "done" for gentlemen for twenty years never before had one of them kept poultry in his bedroom.

But enough of these records of the past; let us rather return to the pets of the present and the future, for the retired.

As far as we ourselves are concerned we have renounced all furred or feathered pets. The fun of keeping them is not worth the inevitable tragedy of losing them. Horses and dogs live for a reasonable span of life, but they scarcely

come under the head of pets, for are not horses the drudges and dogs the slaves of man?

But in the case of the smaller animals and birds, however healthy they may be, however happy, all too soon they suddenly die, and we are left once again to mourn the loss of a little friend. There was Miss Parker, Miss Nosey Parker. What a character! What sense of discernment! She who never bit her mistress or her master, however much they tickled her tummy or rolled her on her back, while the slightest liberty on the part of an outsider caused her instantly to draw blood. How different from the fawning dog which wags its tail at the caress of any passing stranger. We found her one day in a small animal shop in the Camden Road and fell in love on sight, when she pressed her back against her prison bars to be scratched and gave forth absurd little bird-like cries of gladness the while, and nibbled her wrist in her ecstasy. In serious books on natural history Miss Parker is referred to as the ringtail coatimundi, one of the racoon family. Her home is in the forests of Central America, where her nocturnal rambles cause terror and death to small beasts and slumbering birds. Our Miss Parker had a long body, a very long prehensile tail, a long and extremely inquisitive nose which she was able to turn in every direction, and four short bandy legs. Her furry coat was thick and of a deep chocolate colour, while her tummy was pale yellow, and her short, plump arms black, which made them look like the arms of a Victorian lady in long black gloves.

She possessed all the engaging qualities of the Central American Latin races, passion, courage, good looks, agility of mind and body, without any of their less pleasing characteristics. Highly emotional, it was only necessary to commiserate with her over some imaginary woe to reduce her to sobs and tears, though if you felt in the mood for a rough and tumble she was ready for one, too. A sad

slave to the pleasures of the table, nothing in the way of food came amiss to her, though her two favourite delicacies were chocolates and slugs. All food, with the exception of bread and milk, was consumed with the same unvaried ritual.

Rapidly with both paws she would roll the morsel, whether slug, chocolate, earthworm, or bird's egg, over and over again. Then with loud smacking of the lips the delicacy was chewed and swallowed with eyes and long nose cast heavenwards in an expression of ecstasy. But to watch Miss Parker enjoying one of those enormous black slugs that come out for walks on warm summer evenings after a shower of rain was no spectacle for anybody with a squeamish stomach. One most curious habit she had was this. Not far from the old pig-sty which she occupied in the summer months was an engine house. Outside this stood a large tank containing paraffin. This tank had a tap which leaked, and on the ground beneath the tap there was always a puddle of liquid paraffin. The instant the door of the pigsty was opened Miss Parker would push her way out, and with arched back and tail held high, bound as fast as ever her short legs would carry her to the paraffin tank. Then the same ceremony would be gone through each time. She would squat down beside the puddle, dip her front paws in the paraffin, and then, seizing her tail, briskly rub it from stump to tip, groaning all the while to show her happiness.

Miss Parker had a rival in our affections, but as she spent her days with us and George was strictly nocturnal, the two never met or clashed. George was an Australian flying phalanger, very small and agile, with soft grey fur. We all adored him. He slept throughout the day in a box full of fresh hay, which was suspended in a big cage. Directly night came, George was up and about, springing with agile bounds from perch to perch, impatient to be let out. The moment the cage door was opened he would leap to the floor

and begin to explore the drawing-room, always proceeding round the room in the same direction, as port wine is handed round or playing-cards are dealt. He was never known to go the other way.

He would climb up the drawn curtains, run nimbly along the curtain rod, and then run down again head first to the floor. Every object, bookcase, table leg, or human being that came in his path he swarmed up and then swarmed down again. He had a very prehensile tail, by which he would hang suspended from your finger while his big bright eyes took stock of his surroundings. The last inch of his tail was quite bare of fur and was his only blemish. His favourite tit-bit was a live mealworm, which he would grab in his strong broad hands and greedily devour. Sometimes during his forage round the room he would spy a spider or a daddy-long-legs, which he would spring upon, seize, and devour, dropping the legs on to the floor one by one.

George had many friends and admirers. One was Mr. John Galsworthy. The first time they met was one winter afternoon when Mr. Siegfried Sassoon brought Mr. and Mrs. Galsworthy to tea. George was in his cage in the corner of the room leaping from side to side, impatient to be let out. It was no good trying to explain to George that, as visitors were present, he could not be let out, but presently Mr. Galsworthy himself suggested that George should be liberated, and so the door was opened and out he hopped and began his usual round of the room, left to right. The novelist at once fell under the spell of George, who, seeming to sense a friend, ran up his leg and back and then settled on his shoulder. Presently while George was scampering about in front of the half-circle of admirers seated round the fireplace, one of them remarked on the bareness of George's tail and asked if all flying phalangers had tails bald at the tip. We had to confess that the caudal baldness of George was

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not normal and that a variety of remedies had been tried, all in vain. Suddenly my wife turned to Mr. Galsworthy and asked, "Do you know of any certain cure for baldness, Mr. Galsworthy?" Alas, too late, she appreciated the tactlessness of the question.

The end of little George, like that of Miss Parker, was the same inevitable one of all pets, and left the same empty cage and empty heart. They both died about the same time, and the sorrow of their loss determined us never again to keep a warm-blooded pet, furred or feathered.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE of the advantages of growing older is that you can alter not only your mode of living, but your opinions. In early life I was a considerable keeper of birds. I began by keeping them in cages, but soon gave up cages for aviaries, which are far better in every way. However large a cage may be, however much care is bestowed on the bird in it, the fact remains that the bird is a prisoner behind bars. You may retort, but so is a bird in an aviary, however large, a prisoner. But I must say that my birds seemed very happy. The aviaries, which were big ones, were out of doors and filled with small trees, bushes, flowering plants and climbing roses, hops and other creepers, while the floors were carpeted with various sorts of seeding grasses. They were well screened from the wind and had dark cosy shelters, where the birds could roost at night if they wished or retreat to during the day. Even the tropical birds thrived out of doors, in spite of the coldest weather, and many of them nested and brought up families.

But now I cannot confine a bird even in the largest aviary. The only bird we have kept at Crossbows was Greta. But in her case the position was reversed: she was the master, we her slaves. We found her one day in early summer, lying upon the grass beneath one of the tall oak trees in the garden by the pond. I do not think we should have noticed her at all but for her gaping yellow mouth with which she frantically signalled to us as we passed. She was a fledgeling mistle-thrush, a "shrietch," as we call them in our part of Sussex. After some craning of our necks we discovered her home, the nest she had fallen from, on a horizontal branch high up above. Every few minutes the

hard-working parents arrived at the nest with food, when four eager heads with beaks wide open would shoot up, giving shrill cries of excitement. As it was impossible to reach the nest and replace the fallen young one, we put it for safety from prowling rats and weasels into a large open wicker basket and hoped the parents would hear her cries and feed her. But they took no notice whatever of their lost child, whose cries gradually grew fainter and fainter. As it became evident that the parents, callous or unobservant, were going to do nothing for their wanderer, we took the responsibility on ourselves and adopted her. This proved to be a more laborious task than we had bargained for. We made her a snug nest in a box which Greta—which was the name the children gave her owing to her large and lustrous eyes—settled down into happily, and I gave her her first meal of chopped-up earthworms and caterpillars. That night I slept in my dressing-room with Greta asleep in her box on the table beside me, for I knew that an early meal would be required next morning. So it was, though earlier than I had expected. At grey dawn I was awakened by shrill cries, to find Greta craning her open beak towards me over the side of the box. The breakfast I had prepared consisted of hard-boiled egg, chopped worms, and bread crumbs. I gave her several spoonfuls of this sustaining and, I hoped, filling mixture, and went back to bed to get a few more hours of sleep. But not a bit of it. In ten minutes Greta was yelling for another helping and continued to yell until she got it. In this way the three next weary hours passed slowly by; each time I settled down to sleep I was roused again by my ravenous roommate. This sort of thing could not go on. The next night I placed a cover over Greta's box which excluded all light. After this I was able to sleep undisturbed until a more reasonable hour, while she slept peacefully and quietly in her dark box until I lifted the lid, when up shot

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Greta like a Jack-in-the-box clamouring for food. For the two or three weeks which followed we did little else but prepare food, which we kept shovelling down Greta's insatiable gullet. Day by day we watched her grow larger.

Before long, quills sprouted, which became tail and wing feathers. During this stage she occupied a large wicker cage, but when she began to fly a little we let her out, and whenever we went about the house, upstairs or down, she followed us. She became absolutely tame and treated us as equals. One of us might be seated in the garden reading a newspaper, when suddenly without warning Greta would arrive and attempt to perch on the top of the paper or on one's head. If my wife was knitting, Greta would try to settle comfortably on the woollen garment amongst the knitting-needles. She loved a ball of wool to play with, and would romp on the floor with one, like a kitten. A favourite game of hers was to settle on your head and pull out a hair from time to time. This she loved doing and seemed to look upon our cries of pain as a great joke. If ever a bird could laugh, Greta could. On extremely hot days we would sit indoors in the library and Greta used to settle down beside us on the cool polished mahogany book-case, with all her feathers fluffed out. From time to time she would shuffle along to another cooler spot. At night we used to put her in the cage for fear of her falling a prey to some nocturnal prowler, but she was always let out again early the next morning.

She hated to be left alone and would hunt for us upstairs or down until she found one of us. She was full of character, would fly into a temper if crossed, knew her own mind, and usually got her own way. As she grew bigger and stronger she used to make longer flights. One day she flew up and perched on the top of the house roof to the alarm of the swallows and martins, which, screaming angrily, made sudden swoops at her. Poor Greta had

never before been treated like that and was terribly frightened and soon came flying down to us for protection. And then, of course, the day came. We knew it must, sooner or later, but kept hoping against hope that it would not. It was one morning after breakfast while Greta was seated on the porch between my wife and myself that without warning she flew off into an elm tree some fifty yards away. I think she had heard another of her race calling. We watched her anxiously, banging all the while on the tin in which her mealworms were kept, usually an irresistible attraction. But for the first time she took no notice of it. Then after a while we saw our darling flying away across the meadow, to disappear into the thick leafy top of another tree, and that was the last we ever saw of our dear adopted child.

Once more I say it is a grave mistake to allow yourself to become too deeply devoted to a pet. All this happened two years ago, but still, whenever we hear the familiar cry of a shrietch, we look towards each other and say "Greta."

However, this was a far happier ending of an animal friendship than most. I remember, for example, my two baby seed-snipes. It happened years and years ago when at the age of seventeen I went as naturalist with the Fitzgerald expedition to the Andes. While the rest of the party explored and climbed virgin peaks, I roamed the valleys and barren mountain-sides in search of specimens for the Natural History Museum. For one elusive bird, the seed-snipe, I searched a long while before I managed to procure a specimen. I shot a pair of them at last in a marshy spot, high up a sterile valley. When I stooped to pick up one of the dead birds I found three downy young ones crouching on the damp ground. I was determined to save them if I could and took them carefully back with me that evening to my camp. As the cold at night at that altitude, some 12,000 feet, was intense, although the days were very hot, I

wrapped up my triplets in a nest of cotton-wool, and to keep them warm tucked the nest beside me in my eiderdown sleeping-bag. There they seemed to be happy enough, and as I fell asleep I heard them making little chirping sounds to one another.

When I awoke the next morning I opened the nest to find all my babies were dead and flat, for I had inadvertently overlaid them. Poor comfort to me, or to them, that they now are, with their parents, camphor-scented mummies in the bird-room of the Museum in the Cromwell Road.

One of the heads of departments at the museum was Oldfield Thomas. He was a man with three main interests in life. He never mixed them. They were, first and foremost, small mammals, then came his health, and, thirdly, croquet. As this is not a biographical essay on a distinguished naturalist, but a method of introducing the story of one more household pet, it will be enough to say that Thomas was keeper of the mammal department, and occupied a large room where he sat at a desk surrounded by hundreds of boxes which contained thousands of skins of specimens of the smaller mammalia. In that room he thought and talked of nothing else but small mammals. Outside the museum he talked mostly about his health; he was, to be quite frank, a hypochondriac. His summer holidays he spent at Bournemouth playing in croquet tournaments, in the excitement of which he had, I hope, no thought for either small mammals or his own inside. To amateur naturalists like myself, Oldfield Thomas was indeed a good friend. If a friend, or a stranger for that matter, happened to mention that he was starting the following week to visit the Laccadive Islands in search of quiet, or Archangel in search of local colour, Thomas would say, "The Museum collection is very poorly off for the small mammals of the Laccadives," or wherever the place might be, "and the trustees would be very grateful if you would

bring them back a few mice." Before the seeker after quiet or local colour had time to realize what he had let himself in for, Thomas had pressed upon him a box, shaken him by the hand, and ushered him out. On unpacking the box at home the traveller would find it contained several special mouse-traps, a tin of arsenical soap to preserve the skins of the mice he was going to catch, cotton-wool to stuff them with, and a needle and reel of cotton to sew them up with. There would also be printed instructions on how to trap and skin mice. But Thomas had such a charming manner with him that even such unlikely people as lawyers or bank managers have been known to arrive at Monte Carlo or Cairo with a box of mouse-traps and to set to work to catch and skin small rodents. But if a hard taskmaster, Thomas was a generous one. His form of reward to us amateur collectors was to name new sub-species after us. I myself can boast of many god-children, or namesakes, amongst others a new garden dormouse from the island of Formentera, two squirrels and a bat from the jungles of Southern India, as well as a small vole with white ear tufts from the high Andes. This form of reward was very flattering, although a noted naturalist hinted to me the other day that most, or at all events many, of these complimentary nomenclatures will not stand the acid test of modern classification.

For a long while I thought that Thomas's interest in small mammals was confined to the dry stuffed skin, and so it was a pleasant surprise when for the first time I visited him and his wife at their small house in St. Petersburg Place, to discover I had misjudged him. On entering the drawing-room, and after being presented to Mrs. Thomas, I was invited to sit down. As I was just about to sink into a comfortable-looking couch, sofa, or divan, my host and hostess, crying out, rushed at me and dragged me away. Not unnaturally I was a good deal taken aback at this extra-

ordinary behaviour when Thomas, pointing to the upholstered sofa I so nearly sat upon, gasped out, "*Mus sylvaticus*—nest with young!" A person unaccustomed to visit the houses of naturalists, or one unacquainted with the habits of rodents, might not have appreciated the situation as quickly as I did, nor seen how nearly he had sat upon a nursing mother woodmouse and her babies.

No animal makes a more delightful pet than a badger, but it is a whole-time one. Keeping a badger is like being married to a famous actress or a lovely film star. She needs constant attention and amusement. I once kept one—a badger—in London. I made it a comfortable home, a sort of hutch with a door and filled it with clean straw and placed it in a corner of the backyard of our house. The hutch was so constructed as to make it quite impossible for the badger to escape. I arose early the morning after the badger was first put into the new hutch and found it empty, except for the straw. This was my first lesson on the vanishing capacity of badgers. A hue and cry was at once raised, but no sign of the missing brock. It seemed impossible he could have climbed up the high walls of the yard, but an animal which could get out of that hutch might be equal to getting out of anything. Eventually some newly excavated earth was noticed at the base of the wall of the house. On removing this a hole was found, and on poking down this with a long stick angry gruntings and growls could be heard. Dishes of tempting food, bread and milk and treacle, were put down to tempt Gupworthy to come out, but all in vain. The next morning all the food was gone and there was another larger mound of earth, and, what was worse, several bricks and pieces of concrete, evidently part of the foundation of the house. The following night exactly the same thing happened, only more and larger pieces of concrete were lying about. Then my father asserted his authority as head of the family by declar-

ing the thing had gone far enough. A few more nights of such energetic excavation, he said, would cause the house to fall about our heads, and he gave orders that the badger should be got rid of forthwith. It is one thing to order a badger to be got rid of, but quite another to carry out the order. In the end, the Zoo was appealed to for help, and a gang of experts arrived, who with pick and shovel mined and countermined in the bowels of the earth beneath our house and eventually captured the irate Gupworthy in a strong net. Thus my first and last attempt to keep a badger in London came to an end. A home for him was offered by the Zoo, but I felt that so active a beast would pine behind iron bars or on a reinforced concrete floor, so I decided to write to Mr. Alfred Pease, whose book about badgers I had read and enjoyed, to ask him if he would be willing to turn our badger free in his badgery in Lincolnshire. To this proposal Mr. Pease kindly agreed, and so Gupworthy Brock was sent off to the north and liberated.

This badger of mine was dug out of a wooded coomb called Gupworthy in Somersetshire, and when I got him he was only a baby. He at once became very tame and lovable and a tremendous guzzler of bread and milk. Most of the badgers which were dug out were kept for baiting with terriers, a despicable form of sport which I am afraid is still practised on the quiet.

One day—I was then a boy of thirteen or fourteen—I was invited to attend one of these badger baitings at an out-of-the-way inn on Exmoor called the Heath Poul. There was quite a concourse of farmers who had ridden with their dogs to see the fun. Before it began we all went to admire the badger, a newly caught one, a sow of enormous size. The poor frantic animal was in a loose box hidden beneath a truss of straw and the obliging innkeeper would stir the badger up with a long pole in order to show off her fighting qualities. Before the show began the innkeeper suggested

the company should return to the house to sample his cider, which was the real object of the badger-baiting. After the men and dogs had all gone off to the inn and the stable was deserted, I did a rash thing which I still wonder I dared to do. As soon as I was alone I opened the door of the loose-box, entered it, and with the pole tried to drive the protesting badger out. At first she would not budge, but performed the ostrich trick by burying her striped head beneath the straw. Then at last she seemed to understand what was up, and went shuffling out of the stable door, where she stood for a moment to look round, and then went lolloping hurriedly away to freedom. Had I been a cool-headed criminal I should then have mingled unobtrusively with the cider-drinkers and been unsuspected, and would have been able to recount the scene which took place when the refreshed sportsmen found the stable door wide open and the quarry flown.

What an admirable creature the badger is, and how maligned. To "stink like a brock" is still a common saying, yet the badger is the cleanest, sweetest beast there is. From time to time he has a thorough spring-clean of his burrow or earth, throws out the old bedding and replaces it with clean bracken. On warm sunny days he will often drag out his bedding and spread it to air at the entrance of his earth.

The most quaint beliefs about badgers are to be found in old natural history books. One is that the legs of a badger are shorter on one side than on the other, a wise provision of nature to enable the badger, which lives on steep hills, to run in comfort and ease along the side of the steepest mountain. How the badger managed, when he turned round to go home, those old naturalists failed to explain. A hunting friend of mine—I have several—told me of a most curious experience which happened to him when he was out cubbing one morning. Hounds had broken cover out of some

gorse and were running on a scent, when to his amazement he beheld a large badger shuffling along in the midst of the hounds. His explanation of this extraordinary proceeding, and it seems to be the only one, was that the badger, returning from his nightly rambles, had suddenly found himself involved in a running pack of hounds and had wisely concluded that the best thing he could do in such a predicament was to join in the hunt and so hope to escape notice until a chance offered to slip away unobserved.

I have a profound admiration for badgers. For generations, since the days of the mammoth, they have lived their harmless, obscure lives in spite of constant harrowing and tormenting, but it really looks as though a better time was at hand for them, and that our only English bear was to be spared from extinction, for without doubt there is an increasing sentiment in favour of the badger. Not that he has not still many enemies amongst the ignorant, particularly pheasant shooters, gamekeepers, and fox-hunters. He is accused of helping himself to a clutch of pheasants' eggs occasionally, but certainly this is a crime he is very rarely guilty of. But even a whisper of such a misdeed is quite enough for your pheasant rearer or gamekeeper to condemn all badgers to death—which is about as logical as to say that because a clergyman was once caught red-handed in the act of shooting a fox, all clergymen shoot foxes and all clergymen must be destroyed.

Not far from where we live resides a nobleman of fairly ancient lineage in a vast baronial edifice. Once each year he himself presides over a badger digging in one of his woods. This is not done with any wrong-headed notions about sport, but to procure badgers to make into badger hams. It has for generations been the custom of his family to eat badger hams once a year, and the present holder of the title is a stickler for keeping up the old family traditions. On the appointed day his retainers go forth early to begin the

laborious work of digging, for laborious it is to dig out the ancestral stronghold of a cete of badgers in a hanging beech wood on the steep downland slopes. Some of these badgers' earths are very ancient; they existed even before the foundations were laid of the hall of the lord himself. They are full of windings and tunnels, which extend deep into the hillside. At a later hour in the morning his lordship arrives to watch and give advice to his henchmen. The hours pass by pleasantly enough, and there is nothing which whets the appetite more than watching others at hard physical labour. Luncheon is spread out on a grassy bank whence the proceedings can be observed. Champagne corks pop and all is merriment. At last the long-awaited-for news is announced, a badger has been cornered. Now comes the moment for the badger to be tailed. There are two ways of seizing a fierce badger: one is by means of a pair of steel-toothed pincers; the other, which calls for courage, coolness, quickness, and strength, by tailing it. The lord does not allow the use of pincers, and all credit to him. Each year the same man claims the right to perform the dangerous task. He is a tall, powerful farmer. The badger may, perhaps, be a fierce sow, weighing upwards of forty pounds. While she is engaged furiously fighting the pack of yelping dogs, the farmer draws near and, awaiting his opportunity, at the precise moment darts his hand down towards the battling fury and quick as thought has seized her by her short tail, and holds her up at arm's length where her savage teeth can do no harm. In this position brock is harmless and easily deposited in an open sack.

Badgers are gregarious and live together in families or cetes, and where one badger is caught, others of various ages and sizes can be captured as well. Our local badgers are, I am sorry to say, much harried, but after putting in a good word for them with the head of the shooting syndicate, I hope that they are now to be less worried. That is

to say, the official digging for them is to be stopped, but many still will be caught by a paw in the steel-toothed gins of which the keepers are so fond.

One good deed our badgers do is to dig out the wasps' nests and eat up the wasp grubs, and another point in their favour is that they help to keep in check the swarms of rabbits which no amount of shooting, trapping, and ferreting will do.

A very interesting fact about badgers was told me by a lady I met for the first time at a dance held at the Women's Institute on the night of the Jubilee celebrations at Monkton. Perhaps the free meat tea which preceded the dance had loosened her tongue a trifle. We were sitting out a dance together when suddenly she began to talk about fleas. I did not like to inquire what had brought this rather unusual topic to her mind. She was, I discovered, a parasitologist, not a professional in the science or study of parasites but an enthusiastic amateur. Probably had parasitology been her profession she would not have talked "shop" to a comparative stranger, but like every amateur, whether a holder of the certificate in first aid of the St. John Ambulance, or a protestant who has embraced the Roman Catholic faith in adult life, she could not help but talk about her pet subject. Out of a mass of interesting facts she poured out, only one or two remain fixed in my memory, but they struck me at the time, and I still consider them very significant. After assuring me it was all a popular fallacy that fleas are either dirt-loving or an indication of dirty people, she went on to tell me the staggering piece of news—and this is the pith of all this—that the human flea (*Pulex irritans*) is found only on the badger and on man! I was more than pleased to hear of this as it seemed to form yet one more link to bind together ourselves and a most charming animal. In gratitude to this lady for the debt I, and all badgers, owe her, I should like to be able to give her

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name, but unfortunately, if I ever heard it when we were introduced, I have now forgotten it. Though only an amateur or a dilettante of science, she was a keen enthusiast on the subject of her choice. Who was it invented that wise aphorism, "The specialist knows more and more about less and less, while the amateur knows less and less about more and more" ?

CHAPTER XIV

ONE summer the Steyning Cricket Club decided to hold a carnival and fête to raise funds to build a new pavilion. Various people were invited to organize side-shows, swings, roundabouts, coco-nut shies, and all the other attractions which are so popular at country fairs.

The committee asked us if we would run an exhibition of unusual pets and rashly we agreed to do so. A marquee was hired with trestle tables for the cages and glass aquariums. Our attempts to induce the townspeople to lend their pets for exhibition met with poor response, only a goose, Jim; two cream-coloured guinea-pigs, and a green parrot were forthcoming, and, except for Jim, none were at all unusual pets. So it fell to ourselves to make up the greater part and it proved no light task to capture, pack up, and transport by car enough of our own menagerie to fill the tent. Threepence was charged for admission, and as each visitor paid his money, he—or she—was handed a card on which was printed

Steyning Cricket Club Carnival

Menagerie of Unusual Pets

I judge

to be the most unusual pet exhibited.

Signed

At the end of the show the votes were to be counted and the pet—or its lender—that received the largest number was to be presented with a prize. For some reason or other this opportunity for recording their choice in writing proved very popular, for almost every visitor filled in and signed a card.

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Our own contribution to the exhibition was as follows:

Miss Parker.

Mr. and Mrs. Watson, giant toads from Trinidad.

Edible frogs.

Green wall lizards.

A pair of English sand lizards (which produced five lively offspring during the show, to the great concern of the local inspector of the R.S.P.C.A.)

Fire-bellied toads.

Venus and Adonis—changeable toads.

Geckos.

Bull frogs.

Water terrapins.

Newts, crested, Alpine, and marbled.

Giant water beetles.

Mr. and Mrs. Podmore, smooth-clawed water frogs from the Zambezi River.

Green tree frogs.

Slowworms.

Salamanders.

Stick insects.

Midwife toads.

Minnows.

Sticklebacks.

Golden rudd.

Fancy goldfish.

Sun-fish.

Bitterling carp.

Common roach.

Unfortunately, George the phalanger, being asleep all day, could not be exhibited. If he had he would, without doubt, have been a hot favourite for the first prize.

Altogether our show was an unqualified success, and a

constant stream of visitors—largely children—poured in, and only one of these visitors demanded his money back, and he was in liquor.

We had a little trouble with some of the sightseers who would persist in teasing the exhibits, or tried—most rashly—to tickle Miss Parker. At first Miss Parker was extremely temperamental, but settled down after a while and thoroughly enjoyed her day out.

There was only one really regrettable incident during the whole day. Next to Miss Parker's cage was another containing Mr. Wood's green parrot. This bird was an out-and-out hearty; screamed, flapped his wings, called out inane remarks to passers-by, and was all the time showing off and trying to attract attention. Miss Parker took a violent dislike to him from the first. Presently an elderly lady came along, stopped opposite the green parrot, called him "Pretty Polly," scratched his poll, and after more of this rather stupid and fulsome blandishment, passed on to Miss Parker's cage. Probably she was a little short-sighted, for she stooped down with her face close to the bars of the cage to examine Miss Parker, and then said out aloud, "Oh! What a horrid-looking creature! I shan't vote for you, I shall vote for Pretty Polly." At that instant, pent with fury, Miss Parker darted forward and gave the lady a sharp bite in the arm. The lady shrieked, a crowd quickly collected and I hurried up, fearing the worst. The inspector of the R.S.P.C.A. having satisfied himself it was the lady and not the animal which had been hurt, moved away. I applied iodine to the wound, which proved to be not severe, and in the end the lady forgave Miss Parker, and was so generous as to admit that she had not shown a proper regard for the feelings of Miss Parker, and in the end we all parted the best of friends.

When the show closed and my young assistants were packing up the exhibits for their journey home, I sat in a

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corner of the tent and began to add up the votes on the cards. It was gratifying, though not surprising, to find that Miss Parker headed the list and had won for Crossbows the first prize, a claret jug. Less expected were the runners-up, the stick insects, the least spectacular of all the competitors.

Perhaps it is worth while to give in their order the first seven on the list with the numbers of votes each received:

1. Miss Parker, 52
2. Stick insects, 32
3. Bull frogs, 31
4. Water terrapins, 26
5. Mr. and Mrs. Watson, 23
6. Jim, the goose, 20
7. Mr. and Mrs. Podmore, 17

The green parrot, we all were pleased to see, had received only eight votes. But it was the unusual pet at the bottom of the list which received only a single vote which surprised and puzzled me most of all.

Some unknown admirer, female, to judge by the handwriting, had cast her vote for "Dr. Gosse." I spent a long while trying to decipher the signature on the card but could not recognize it.

It was, of course, gratifying in a way to get a vote at all, but I did rather resent being beaten for the last place in the list by the fire-bellied toads, who got two votes to my one. If my fair but unknown admirer's handwriting had not been so clear I might have thought she had written "Gosse" for "Goose," but the "Dr." did away with any such hopes.

The cricket club carnival proved such a financial success that a few months later a garden fête was held at the Hall, to raise money to buy a new bicycle for the vicar. We were invited to repeat our show of animals, but once had been

quite enough, what with catching, packing, and carting so many pets to and fro, particularly the fish. One of the side-shows at this fête was a newly caught wild badger. It was on show in a disused pigsty. In the sleeping quarters was a heap of straw, beneath which the terrified badger hid. The sum charged for admittance to see the badger was fourpence. As soon as half a dozen or more spectators were gathered together, Nobby, the gamekeeper, who was in charge, would seize a hay-fork and vigorously prod the straw until the badger, gibbering with pain, fear, and rage, emerged from the shelter for the onlookers to gaze at. At the end of the day the squire's lady announced the sums the different side-shows had raised, and the one which had raised the largest for the vicar's new bicycle was the badger. A few days later I happened to meet Nobby on his rounds and asked him what had happened to the badger after the fête. "Knocked'n on the head," he replied. "What," I asked, "do you really mean you killed it—but why?" "Well," said Nobby, "'e weren't no good to nobody."

As I have already recorded, after the death of Miss Parker and George, we decided we would never again keep a warm-blooded pet. The price is too big to pay. But pets one must have, so now we keep only reptiles and fish. You can never become deeply attached to a fish. I like to keep fishes, but somehow a fish always seems to keep its distance, never giving itself body and soul to its owner as warm-blooded animals do. Also fish, except sticklebacks, are extraordinarily stupid.

But amongst the reptiles, in which class I include for convenience frogs and toads, there are to be found many faithful and intelligent friends.

Personally, I have had from earliest childhood a passion for toads. My mother used to tell me that when I was a very small boy I was always catching toads and bringing them into the house. On one occasion, when she went up

to the night nursery before going to bed herself, she found me lying fast asleep in my cot with a large toad tightly clasped in my arms, and she had some difficulty in disengaging the toad without waking me up or injuring the unfortunate batrachian.

This important subject of toads leads irresistibly to the equally important one of the terrarium, but before discussing that essential appurtenance of the modern country house, I should like to say a word or two about our garden toad, with which we have got to be on friendly terms. In what hole or drain he lives has never been ascertained, but as sure as cheese is cheese, on any hot summer evening, particularly after a shower of rain, this toad is to be met walking down the garden path. We call him Beverley.

Some people, women mostly, have what they call a natural aversion for toads—unnatural, I call it. This feeling of antipathy they have even more strongly for snakes. I read not long ago that a professor of zoology in Paris had discovered that this repugnance to snakes and other reptiles was curable, even in the most stubborn cases. The treatment he advised was simple. All the sufferer had to do was to gently stroke a snake for five minutes each day. At the end of one month the professor guaranteed that all feeling of aversion for snakes would have gone.

The terrarium—which is the terrestrial counterpart to the aquarium—may be established within or without the house. One great drawback to having the terrarium in the house is, if it is at all like my own home-made one, that the inmates are liable to escape and be difficult to find amongst the furniture and fixtures of an ordinary dining-room or study. Another drawback is that careless serving-maids are apt to tread a newt or small toad into the carpet. A better place for the terrarium is in the heated greenhouse. If you have no greenhouse, build one before making your terrarium. As I flatter myself that this chapter is going to

bring about a boom in terraria, I feel it incumbent on me to say a little about their construction.

If you like, you can buy a plate-glass vivarium with a perforated zinc lid, but these are expensive and never large enough. Far better to make your own, of wood and glass or wire-netting, but see to it that there are no means of escape. Looking casually at a toad or a water-tortoise, you would think it too stupid to escape out of a soup-plate, and utterly impossible for it to break loose from your carefully constructed prison, even if it wished to. But be warned in time. There squats the clumsy toad; deaf, dull, replete with earthworms, in the hole she has dug for herself in the moss beneath the shady fern. The moment your back is turned that self-same toad will, by some miracle of agility which the eye of man has never yet witnessed, have swung herself up to the highest pinnacle of your terrarium and squeezed through some small chink which she has discovered, but which had escaped your notice, and which in any case is not one-half the circumference of the toad. How it is done, no one knows; it is just one of Nature's riddles.

But to return to the terrarium—which your escaped toad will never do. Ours is built into one of the sides of a division of the greenhouse. It has two large, sloping covers of wood and wire-netting which can be lifted up. Hot pipes run beneath the foot of earth which forms the floor. In this are planted various sorts of fern, which if kept damp grow luxuriously. The ground between the ferns is carpeted with moss and that scourge of rockeries, *Helixine solierrolii*, the latter forming excellent cover for the reptiles and for small insects which are useful as food. Brown earthenware bowls make good ponds, if sunk deep into the earth. Small ferns planted at the edge of the ponds give the terrarium the appearance, in miniature, of the river Amazon. At one end is dry sand; the turtles and even the toads like a

spell occasionally in the dry desert as a change from the steaming jungle. For trees, I plant tangerine pips, which soon grow up into veritable giants in this dwarf forest.

And now, having your terrarium, your pocket primæval jungle, the exciting question arises as to what to stock it with. There are several animal dealers in London who keep a good supply of reptiles, though not all species can be purchased all the year round. I have before me the current price list of an Italian dealer, Signor Cura, whose shop is in a humble alley hidden beneath the bridge in Rosebery Avenue. If you are unable to go in person to make your choice, send for his catalogue. But be careful, if you are a beginner, for discretion is needed.

It would, for example, be rash for the novice to order from the price list a Gippsland water dragon, although only twenty-five shillings each, which after all is a small sum to pay for a dragon; nor should he be tempted by a blue-tongued or even a stump-tailed lizard. Cunningham's skink we all know has its adherents, and so has the armoured girdle lizard and the giant zonure. Nor should the tyro fall to the temptation of a bargain. My price list informs the public that Signor Cura has just received from India a consignment of more than one hundred pythons, each twelve feet in length, and that he is in a position to sacrifice these at the ridiculously low price of twelve pounds each—only one pound per foot of living python. Lower down the same list I discover another bargain in the serpent line, one unlikely ever to be repeated. It is a job lot of one thousand grass-snakes for the trifling sum of twenty pounds. It has always been a profound mystery to me how the wholesale dealer gets all these reptiles. Who is it who can capture one hundred pythons or one thousand grass-snakes and how on earth does he do it? If I am able to find and catch two grass-snakes in one whole summer I consider I have done remarkably well, but one thousand!

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Having warned the beginner against the natural temptation to launch out in too ambitious a style, I will offer him a more modest list.

Begin your menagerie with a pair of giant toads from Central America: *Bufo marinus*—large ones measuring six inches across the back cost ten shillings each, but smaller ones are cheaper and are well worth the money. You will become much attached to these toads, and possibly they will to you, and anyhow they will look impressive as they crouch side by side half hidden in the jungle. To counteract the somewhat sluggish giant toads, a pair of English natterjack toads will serve well, for they are the most brisk and cheerful of all the family. They do not hop, or creep upon their bellies, as do other toads, but run swiftly and nimbly about on the tips of their toes like mice. One dealer recommends the natterjack as the most suitable toad for ladies, and I entirely agree with him. The American bullfrog is an ornament to any terrarium, but I do not recommend him to the beginner. He jumps enormous distances and eats live frogs, and in the night you and your household may sit up in your beds wondering however that bellowing bull-calf got into the greenhouse.

At least one pair of edible frogs should have its place in every well-appointed terrarium. They are lively, intelligent, and handsome frogs. They are the green frog of the child's story-book that would a-wooing go. On hot days the edible frog will float luxuriously in the pond, with legs extended. Its croaking on summer nights recalls the water-tanks of Spain and Italy in spring.

A toad which is very attractive is one called by the dealers the variable toad, though its official name is *Bufo viridis*. On the least provocation it will change from green to brown, then to yellow, and if you look at it again ten minutes later, as likely as not it will be covered with blue or red spots. The only objection to the variable toad is its

genius for escaping. Never yet have I managed to keep one of these kaleidoscopic toads confined for more than a few days. Again and again one is found hopping about on the floor of one of the greenhouses, is captured and returned to the cage. Next morning you look for him and he has again disappeared.

Of the smaller toads, the fire-belly (*Bombinator igneus*), or the orange belly, is highly to be recommended. They too, like the edible frogs, spend much of their time floating with outstretched limbs, and two prominent eyes raised above the level of the water. I think they imagine they look like alligators. They soon become very tame and hurry forward to take a mealworm from the hand. Before they become tame they behave in the most extraordinary way when alarmed. Frighten one of these little black toads and in an instant it will curve its spine up at each end, curl up its sides like a withered leaf, and fold its legs across its back, with its hands held over its two eyes as if afraid to face the danger. By this means it exposes to view its brilliant orange or yellow undersurface. Naturalists surmise that the toad does this to warn intending diners that it will not make a wholesome meal.

In a glass vivarium the little green tree-frog which likes to cling to leaves or to glass is easy to keep and very cheap to buy. He will thrive outdoors in sheltered spots in the south and south-west of England, but his love call at night is like a miniature road-drill or a machine-gun, so that it is well not to liberate these frogs where a pond stands close to your house. The midwife toad (*Alytes obstetricans*) is a gentle little creature, with beautiful eyes and very odd domestic habits. The brown mud-frog of North Africa (*Pelobates fuscus*) would be a more interesting pet if it did not spend its life buried deeply underground. If you place one of these toads on some soft mud it will begin at once to sway its hips like a nautch girl dancer, and slowly but surely

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sink beneath the surface until the mud closes over it. You must then dig, and dig quickly, for that is your only chance ever again to see your *Pelobates fuscus*.

Green wall-lizards do not thrive in the terrarium; it is too damp for them. They do far better at large in the greenhouse, or even better still if liberated in the garden. It would be an exaggeration to say that no country house is complete without some green wall-lizards, but they certainly make a highly attractive addition to a country garden. Above all things these lively little reptiles like to sun themselves on stone terraces or window ledges on the southern aspect of the house. As soon as they are turned loose each lizard takes possession of a small area of the garden, of which he becomes king and tyrant, and woe betide the lizard which ventures to trespass on his neighbour's territory.

On any warm sunny day, even in the winter, the lizards will appear and lie flattened out enjoying the warmth. In cold or wet weather they are not to be seen, for they have retired to sleep in some dry, secluded, sheltered nook. They are agile climbers and will run up the brick walls of the house almost as rapidly as they do along the level ground. On hot days, when not basking in the sunshine, they will hunt for flies and other small game. In search of these they will climb nimbly about the creepers on the walls of the house or among the branches of the bushes. Their favourite bush is the cotoneaster. They like to lie perfectly still along the flat, spreading branches and wait there ready to make a lightning spring on any insect which is rash enough to approach within range. The cotoneaster, no doubt, is the lizard's favourite hunting-ground because that shrub has an irresistible attraction for all kinds of winged insects. The amount of insects, noxious and otherwise, which a lizard will consume must be enormous, so for that reason, if for no other, lizards should be encouraged.

Every lizard sticks to its own small domain and you soon get to know each one. On any hot summer day we are sure to know where to find such old particular friends as Robinson Crusoe, Dr. Dover, Calico Jack, or Captain Dampier.

It is as well to begin with at least two dozen lizards, and we have found it a good thing to replenish the stock for the following two or three years with another dozen, by when they will have become well established. These Italian wall-lizards are quite cheap and should not cost more than six shillings a dozen at the animal dealer's. At first we were afraid that the lizards would not thrive on our clay and chalk soil, that it might be too cold and damp for them, and that they required a sandy soil. But on the contrary they at once settled down and have thriven, and each year produced minute but exceedingly active baby lizards, which soon grew up and fended for themselves. The only harm our lizards ever did was to cause a robin to desert its nest. The robins built their nest on the top of the flint wall of a pigsty, just below the overhanging tile roof. For two years Dr. Dover, a large and rather truculent lizard, had lived in a hole close by. When the nest was built and the five eggs laid, Dr. Dover found the nest to be a very snug bed to sleep in, much to Mrs. Robin's annoyance. Whenever we passed by we used to drive the doctor off the nest and allow the harassed robin to return to her eggs. But we could not spend whole days doing this, and in the end the lizard won and the robins built another nest elsewhere.

One November day the gardener was digging up a flower bed on the south side of the house close under the wall, the territory of Calico Jack and Mary Read, when he unearthed two small oval soft-shelled eggs which he brought to show me. They were lizard's eggs and were placed in some earth in the greenhouse in the hope that they would eventually hatch out two baby lizards.

Before leaving this matter of green lizards a word of warning will not be out of place. Do not be tempted to turn out the big green lizards sold by the dealers as Dalmatian lizards. For one thing they are great wanderers. Another, and a still greater objection to them, is that their favourite food is smaller lizards. Cats as well are sworn enemies of lizards, and will wait for hours until one approaches within pouncing distance. But in any case it is better not to keep a cat in the country, delightful animals though they are, for they will not only roam far and wide, poaching in the woods, but are inveterate bird-killers.

A terrarium can be a source of endless interest and amusement. On a cold, wet, winter day the greenhouse is a cheerful and warm haven where there is always something to do. The water to change in the ponds, the inmates to feed with meal or garden worms, or exciting hunts in the dense undergrowth for missing friends. There is gardening to be done without stooping, a dead limb of some giant of the dwarf forest to be lopped, ferns which have spread too far to be pruned and trimmed. Of all the inhabitants of the terrarium the most attractive to me are the toads, and the bigger they are the more I cherish them. Therefore I love best of all the huge giant toads which inhabit damp, cool, shady nooks in the forests of Central America, Brazil, and Trinidad. Ours, for reasons I need not go into here, are named Mr. and Mrs. Watson.

Toads are found the whole world over; they inhabit all countries except Iceland, Madagascar, Australia, and the islands of the South Pacific, and are very much alike in character. Almost every toad has the same proud, supercilious expression, which gives it such an air of dignity and aloofness and discourages undue familiarity. True it is that some people find fault with his pendulous belly which lies spread out beneath him, but to the true toad-lover this aldermanic feature only adds to his majesty.

It is but in recent years that the toad has come into his own. For centuries the toad was maligned and wrongly accused of many crimes of which, with our better knowledge of his private life, we now know him to have been innocent. To-day only the most ignorant believe that toads suck the milk of cows or turn wine into vinegar. In the past he has been accused of robbing birds' nests of their eggs, not wantonly like the members of the British Oölogists' Association, but to eat. Many a toad in the past suffered torture and lingering death on the assumption that he possessed the evil eye or cast spells on man or beast. Nothing was too bad to believe of the toad—that its spittle drove dogs mad, or that its breath was poisonous. I myself have heard a child's nurse protest when I allowed her little charge to stroke a pet toad that it would cause warts to appear on the child's hands. But the toad of the past was not considered to be always and altogether malignant. It was well known to our forefathers that when toads were properly prepared and applied or swallowed, they formed an infallible cure for the gravel or dropsy, and would stop nose bleeding and soothe pain. A toad slipped beneath the pillow of a sufferer from typhoid fever would bring down his temperature forthwith. If a toad was hung by one leg in a stable, the horses were safe from any fear of infection, and no rat would dare to enter. Moreover, precious stones often lay hidden in the heads of toads. To magicians, sorcerers, doctors, and wizards the toad was an unfailing ally.

The earliest record of a toad being kept as a pet occurred in 1619, and ended disastrously for its owner. In the house of the French philosopher Vanini, some busybody discovered a live toad in a glass bowl, and reported this positive proof of witchcraft to parliament, which at once issued an edict condemning the philosopher to be burned alive at the stake.

Another early friend of toads was the painter John Down-

man. His life was full of vicissitudes. During the height of his success as a fashionable portrait-painter, he suddenly left London to retire to Town Malling in Kent. Here his chief amusement was the taming of animals. His greatest achievement in this line was to train two toads to come to his call, and then at a word of command a dove and a robin would mount on the backs of the toads and be carried about by them. I have never achieved any success like that, nor been able to persuade our Beverley to walk down the garden path mounted by a robin. History records that his neighbours at Town Malling looked askance at the painter from London as an eccentric, which his method of curing a cold by walking in wet grass with naked feet did nothing to modify.

News about toads crops up in all sorts of unlikely places. Who would expect the subject of toads to be on the agenda at the deliberations of a city council? Yet readers of the *Hanley Evening Standard*, July 25, 1934—I like to be precise about dates—will remember a paragraph reporting the proceedings of the Arts Sub-Committee of the Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The meeting had been convened to express the thanks of the City Council for certain gifts presented to the City Art Gallery. Amongst the various objects of art accepted and handsomely acknowledged there were not only several engravings and a large oil-painting, but the following:

One live grass snake, presented by Mr. P. Holland,
Two natterjack toads, the gift of the Rev. E. A.
Elliot, and a photograph of the members of the
Stoke Council, given by Alderman H. Leese.

The Arts Sub-Committee of the Stoke-on-Trent City Council is to be warmly congratulated. By throwing open their doors to toads and other live animals they have gone

a long way towards brightening our art galleries, and I will wager that the number of visitors to the Stoke Art Gallery has gone up by leaps and bounds. Altogether this action is most praiseworthy, though the honour of being the originators of this idea for the encouragement of the study of art belongs to others. The pioneers, I believe, were the trustees of the Tate Gallery, in London, who not many years ago accepted from Mr. Siegfried Sassoon a gift of two live goldfish for exhibition in the fountain in the central hall of their gallery. One hopes that this further step in the right direction will be emulated by the trustees of the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and other London picture galleries.

Both the history and the natural history of the toad are of absorbing interest. Quite lately a delightful book was published in Paris, "*La Vie des Crapauds*," by Monsieur Jean Rostand, which is devoted entirely to the fascinating batrachian. No one intending to keep a toad should fail to procure a copy of the book, which has been translated into English under the title "*Toads and Toad Life*." How fashion changes! The great naturalist Cuvier, whom one can scarcely imagine to have been squeamish over crawling animals, described the toad as being both "hideous and revolting," while Gessner declared "its glance is enough to make a man turn pale and ill." But what a different character does the toad get from his admirer and biographer, Monsieur Rostand! According to this distinguished French naturalist, to the toad belongs the honour of being the first walker in the world. Just consider the importance of that! The toad taught man to walk, and from that first lesson man has gradually progressed and improved until he has become able to travel from England to Australia in three days! Surely the discovery of walking should be cause enough for us to revere the toad, but he did more, for he was the first of all animals to have five fingers to

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his hands; an innovation, Monsieur Rostand sagely observes, very significant. As he points out, there is far greater difference between the fishes and the toads than there is between the toads and man.

What a humbling thought for all of us!

But I tend to become garrulous over my favourite. I am like some amorous swain who loves to talk and talk about his sweetheart, never suspecting what a bore he has become to others. But I like to think that what I have written will not have been all in vain, and that I have won a few more friends for that strange reptile whose yearly life, like all Gaul, is divided into three parts, six months for sleep, one for love, and five for eating.

CHAPTER XV

No people love birds more than the English do. If proof of this were needed, it is to be found in the correspondence columns of our daily newspapers, which are always open to publish letters from their readers about wild birds, however common the birds or trivial the event may be. Far more laws have been made in England to protect wild birds from gunmen and trappers and wild birds' eggs from egg-collectors than in any other country. Although these laws are largely a dead-letter, for neither the gunman nor the egg-collector takes the least notice of them, they go to show the general feeling of the nation about bird protection. Unfortunately these laws do little good, because it is very difficult to procure the sort of evidence necessary for a conviction. Unless the accused is caught red-handed with the body or the eggs of the protected bird in his possession it is not worth while prosecuting. Nor are any laws likely to be effective so long as a private individual is allowed to have in his possession the skins or the eggs protected by the law. Again, when very occasionally a case has been proved, most of our country magistrates appear to be afraid or unwilling to inflict a punishment to fit the crime, and levy only a nominal fine which in no way deters the wrongdoer from doing the same thing again. It is not very long ago that a man was brought up before a bench of magistrates in Hampshire charged with shooting a very rare, beautiful, and fully protected migrant, the hoopoe. In this case there was no doubt whatever, for the man had been caught red-handed, with a gun in one hand and the dead hoopoe in the other. The defence made by the culprit was that he mistook the hoopoe for a jay and therefore shot it. Instead of doubling

the fine for offering such a futile excuse, the presiding magistrate, according to the newspaper report of the case, fined the man half a crown, and allowed him to keep the bird's skin, which he probably sold for a pound or more to some local collector or taxidermist. The reason given by the chief magistrate for his curious act of clemency was that he considered it quite a natural thing to mistake a hoopoe for a jay!

The right and proper thing, it seems to me, would have been to fine the man the full penalty allowed by the law and to confiscate the bird's skin to present to some local museum, and to refuse the man a licence to carry a gun, on the ground that anybody who could not distinguish a hoopoe from a jay was not a fit and proper person to possess a gun at all.

Another example of our national love of birds is the increasing number of bird-sanctuaries which have been made. New ones keep appearing in England and Scotland, largely the result of the splendid work of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It is an uphill and expensive task for the society. Some few acres of shingle on the sea-coast may be known to be the last breeding-grounds of some rare bird, such as the Kentish plover. The shingle may be worth at most a few pounds an acre, but the moment the news leaks out that the society is a possible purchaser, up soars the price and the owner says he cannot possibly accept less than a hundred pounds an acre for his precious shingle. In countries less crowded and over-populated than England, countries like the United States, South or East Africa, or Australia, it is still possible to reserve extensive tracts of uninhabited land to become sanctuaries, where wild beasts and birds may contrive to live unmolested. But this is impossible in such a congested brick-bespattered country as England, and although there are now a great number of bird-sanctuaries in this country, not many of them are more

than a few acres in extent, while some are little more than small plots enclosed in a high railing or fence. How much good these small sanctuaries do for the birds is open to question. The best sanctuaries for all small birds are the big wild hedgerows, and for the larger birds and the birds of prey close woods and coppices where no gamekeeper is employed. In fact the very term Bird Sanctuary is one of danger, for the hardened and unscrupulous egg-robber, or oölogist as he styles himself, will make straight for a bird-sanctuary as a gold-digger will for the latest proclaimed gold-field.

Most of our English sanctuaries are for birds, but at Wickham Fen in Cambridgeshire there is one for butterflies, where the lovely swallow-tail still survives. With the alarming and rapid spread of the *Genus Homo* over the habitable portions of the globe it becomes each year more and more important to form sanctuaries for the survival of the less fit but more beautiful—the birds and beasts which otherwise will be exterminated. It is so easy with modern lethal weapons to exterminate a species which, once it is gone, all the clever scientists in the world can never replace. Much has been done, and is being done, by the small minority who have thought for the future, and who disagree with the popular belief that anything should be sacrificed if by so doing somebody or other can reap an immediate profit in money.

Yet how little is done to preserve the best of our own species at this critical stage in the evolution of the human race, when the rapid progress of so-called civilization threatens to destroy all individuality and beauty. I sometimes wonder if it might not be wise to make in every country a sanctuary for the natives. This has already been done to preserve the aboriginal races in Australia and North America, which were in danger of dying out in the one-sided competition with civilized white races. I would like

to see a part of England, say the Isle of Wight, proclaimed a sanctuary for the English. If I were put in charge of this National Sanctuary with the despotic power of a *duce* to do exactly what I liked, I would begin by ordering the destruction of every building erected later than, say, 1840. Nothing of any kind would be allowed on the Island which had been constructed or erected after that date. This would successfully get rid of hundreds of ugly buildings and would do away with all motor-cars, so that the winding lanes of the Island would once again be safe and pleasant for pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic. There would be an end to telephones, radios, cinemas, and all other electrical contrivances. There would be no hoardings or posters, and it would be a punishable act to erect any structure which would in any way spoil a view or be an eye-sore.

There would be no factories, and only machines driven by hand or horse-power would be permitted. Thus all handicrafts would flourish naturally, and the artisan would not be pressed either for time or for money to turn out "shoddy," but would be able to take his time and make his living calmly, giving to his work only his best. Although there would be few luxuries there would be every comfort. But life would not be all work; there would be plenty of opportunity for play, but the games would be unorganized ones and played only for pleasure and not for publicity or profit. Such spectacles as Wimbledon or the Wembley Cup-tie final would be unknown. The Island newspapers would report the Island news; there would be no space in them for reports on the doings of Mr. Austin or Mr. Bradman.

The occupants of this National Sanctuary, never having listened to the wireless, would speak the English language as it was meant to be spoken, and not in the artificial mincing over-cultivated voice and accents of the B.B.C. announcers,

which the rest of the inhabitants of Great Britain, from the Shetlands to the Scillys, will very shortly be speaking.

There would be the well-off and there would be the poor, but no millionaires and no one would go hungry, nor would there be any financial wizards to make a "corner" in the whole of the next year's crop of wheat. If too much wheat were grown in one season it would be given away to the poor, and not burned or thrown into the sea. The same would happen in a case of a glut of herrings or other fish. Any overseas trade which was necessary for the importation of foreign produce such as tea, coffee, dyes, spices, etc., and the exportation of corn and wool, would be carried by sailing ships only, and all such trade would be with the sanctuaries of other countries. The islanders would enlist their own militia for home defence, otherwise they would be under the military care of the Motherland.

The use of fire-arms would be restricted, only a limited number of licences being issued for muzzle-loading guns. Printing would only be done on hand-presses. The famous Isle of Wight railway system, formed by several independent companies, would be permitted to continue to run their trains as at present, without consulting each other as to times of arrival and departure, and so preserve one of the most interesting and old-world links with a less-hurried and particular age.

The native inhabitants of this National Sanctuary would be strictly limited in number. Applications would be invited and all candidates who wished to reside on the Island Sanctuary would be put through a close and thorough cross-examination to discover if they were fit and proper persons to be admitted. They would have to be prepared to live the simple rural life, the sort of quiet, uncomplicated life our grandparents or great-grandparents lived in England one hundred years ago. There would be no pandering to the faddists, the arty-crafty, or others of that kidney. No

folk-dancers, nudists, or missionaries would be admitted, no such nuisances as girl-guides, nature ramblers, or hikers; neither would cinema operators or bird photographers, distinguished foreigners, trippers, or sightseers be permitted, while all flower-pickers and egg and butterfly collectors would be arrested on sight, and such busybodies as school, factory, or other inspectors and district visitors would be ruthlessly suppressed. To keep out these pests the coast would be closely watched and guarded, particularly in the spring, when the photographers and nature-lovers begin to become active. Once inside the sanctuary the inhabitants would be left to their own devices, to live their own quiet lives as they liked best without any sort of interference from outside, but if ever one of them wished to leave the Island he might do so, on the clear understanding that on no account would he ever be allowed to return.

Critics of my scheme might argue that before long the Island Sanctuary would become over-populated, particularly as the modern cult of birth control would not be practised. But I believe this would not happen. There would be a pretty constant trickle of emigrants from among the younger persons, and also, as the modern rage for sanitation and public health will have dropped back a century, more people will die early of natural causes, and so the balance will be kept up and a race exist which will not be made up, as the rest of the world's population will shortly be, of a vast predominance of elderly and old people. There will be doctors, and the only exception to the rule that no sanctuarians may leave the Island and ever return to it will be the medical students, who will be sent to the mainland to study and obtain their doctors' diplomas. This happy, self-supporting English community will grow its own food, weave its own cloth from the wool of sheep from its own downs, and all the dead or dying crafts, of the

potter, the wheelwright, the ploughwright, the thatcher, and the blacksmith, will come back to their own. They would cure their own home-bred hams, bake their own bread, make cheese fit to eat, and brew beer fit to drink, pure beer without chemicals or synthetic hops. They would elect their own representatives to sit in their parliament, who would levy taxes and make the laws, and all cases would be tried before judges and magistrates of their own choosing.

In the sanctuaries of those countries which possessed a national costume this would be worn. There would be a sufficiency of comfortable inns and taverns, where the people could sit and drink good home-brewed beer at any hour, as well as their own home-grown wines, made of cowslips, dandelions, or white effervescent elderflower wine with a bouquet that fills the whole room, or they would crack a bottle of clary wine or birch wine, and on some great occasion uncork a bottle of that most potent of all English wines, wheat wine, for many of these English wines are, or were, excellent in spite of the scoffs of the members of the Saintsbury Club or of the Wine and Food Society.

Not only England would have her sanctuary, but every race in the world would have one, where people would be able to live happy, simple, dignified lives, while the rest of the world population went tearing along until civilization has made them not only the slaves of the machine and science-ridden, but their home life has been destroyed, and privacy become a thing unknown; a law-ridden world of faddists, teetotallers, non-smokers, and one where babies might not be born without permission of the National Board of Eugenics, and longed-for death only allowed in extreme cases by favour of the National Board of Euthanasia.

Then one day, in a hundred or perhaps two hundred years, a disillusioned world, tottering on the verge of

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disaster and madness, exhausted and distracted, will return to sanity and remodel itself on the various national sanctuaries, which will have preserved the older and better order of life and which will form patterns on which to refashion the world, and so bring about the salvation of the human race.

CHAPTER XVI

No country place is complete without a pond. There is a familiar ring about this remark. I seem to remember saying something of the kind already about other country-house essentials. But what if I have? A house in the country calls for more than one accessory to achieve perfection. If your garden or estate can boast no pond, then one must be made. It need not cost much to dig out a small pond if you live, as we do, on heavy clay soil. But if it is out of the question to dig a pond, if the soil is sandy or there is an inadequate supply of water, or if your garden is too small for a pond, a tub or two sunk in the ground will provide a constant source of interest. A large wine barrel, the sort in which port wine is brought over from Portugal, sawn through the middle, makes two excellent miniature pools. They should be sunk deep enough for the tops to be a few inches below the level of the surrounding turf, in some sheltered corner of the garden. Before pouring in the water, cover the bottom of your tub with four or five inches of good loam. Even in a prolonged summer drought only an occasional can of water will be required to make up for the evaporation.

You have now a miniature pond in which all sorts of aquatic plants may be grown, such as mauve-flowered water-violet, pickerel weed, with its arrow-head leaves and deep blue blossoms, water buttercup, water hawthorn, and a dwarf water-lily. Some floating plants such as frog-bit and one of the many varieties of duckweed are attractive. A very handsome plant which floats is the water-hyacinth (*Eichornea crassipes*), which has large white blossoms which stand up well above the water. This plant will not with-

stand the winter out of doors and should be placed in the greenhouse before the frosts begin. It is necessary to have some submerged aquatic plants in order to oxygenate the water for the fishes and snails which add so largely to the interest of a tub-pond, and which help to keep the tub and plants clean. The fish should not be many or too large. Good varieties to keep are goldfish, small golden orfe, and a pair in each tub of the beautiful sun-fish (*Eupomotis gibossis*)—what a name to give to anything so absolutely lovely!—which will breed in this country. They are ornamented by pale blue spots, and as they have a habit of basking in the sunshine at the surface of the water, you can get a good view of them. The pygmy of all the carp family, the tiny bitterling, does well also, and if one or two freshwater mussels are kept in the tub for them to lay their eggs in they will breed freely. Golden tench are very lovely fish, but as they like to spend their whole lives hiding in the mud at the bottom are hardly ever seen, and are not therefore worth while keeping.

Every tub must have some water-snails; the ram's-horn, the freshwater winkle, and the great pond snail are all big handsome snails and can easily be procured in ponds or from dealers. It is as well, also, to introduce a supply of water-fleas and freshwater shrimps, as they form excellent food for fish fry, and the shrimps are first-class scavengers. As to water-beetles, they are lively, jolly little insects, which are always darting busily hither and thither, but do not on any account allow any of those giant dytiscus beetles to get into your tub, for they are ruthless fish-killers.

For ponds large or small there is a boundless selection of plants to choose from. Besides those already named, there are, for the pond proper, the flowering rush, and the sweet flag and many varieties of water-lily, but the giant white Gladstoniana requires a fairly big pond. The water-soldier is an amusing plant, which bobs up to the surface in

the summer and sinks back to the bottom of the pond when the cold weather comes. Around the edge of the pond rushes should be planted, such as the giant bulrush, and the true bulrush (*Scirpus lacustris*), which grows five feet in height, but is not so ornamental as the graceful reed-mace. Bur-weed does well at the border of a pond and so do the scented and the flowering rush. *Limnanthemum nymphærides* (if it has an English name I do not know it), with its little yellow water-lily-like flowers, does well, and is a rapid spreader, but it can be easily removed with a hay-rake if it becomes too rampant. In the marsh, for, of course, you will make a marsh if you have not one already, you should plant roots of the Royal fern, which grows luxuriantly in damp places, the more sheltered the better. Also you can plant kingcups—single, not double—and bog-bean, cuckoo-flower, mimulus, water forget-me-not, and water bird's-eye, as well as clumps of yellow flag. Some of the evergreen bamboos grow well in marshy or damp soil, and make good shelter and are favourite nesting sites for many kinds of bird; the reed-warbler is very fond of building its nest in a thick clump of bamboo.

There is yet one other inhabitant of ponds which must be mentioned, one which either you like very much indeed or else abominate. I refer to the edible frog, *Rana esculenta*, not in its capacity as a dainty mouthful for the epicure, but as the friend of man, the guardian of the pond and nocturnal minstrel. Some there are, I know, to whom the reiterating guttural notes of *esculenta* are nothing else but a series of discordant croaks, but to others, I am pleased to say, its love-song is both enchanting and ravishing. His home is in the pond; he does not roam abroad as does the common frog. He sticks to his own little piece of territory, a sloping bank on the sunny side of a sheet of water. On hot days he emerges from the deep and takes up his station on the bank facing the pond. When danger threatens he takes a

graceful header, two yards or more, into the water, with arms correctly extended in front, and long legs stretched out behind him. Stop and stand quite still and begin to count, keeping your eye glued to the spot where he disappeared. When you have counted to eighty, or thereabouts, suddenly up will pop a sharp-pointed head out of the water and a beady eye is watching you. Make but the slightest movement and as suddenly as it appeared the head will vanish. If you approach very slowly and cautiously you may sometimes get quite close to an edible frog while he is in song. He does this by means of two vocal sacs of skin on either side of his head, which he inflates with air much as a highlander does his bagpipes, and when the two sacs are as big as gooseberries, he lets the air escape into his throat and pours forth his song, a sound reminiscent of hot nights in Italy or Spain. The hero of the nursery story of the "Frog who would a-wooing go" was of the same race, with the same emerald green coat and the same snowy white waistcoat, which any well-dressed wooer might be proud to wear. But to be honest, if your ear is not attuned to the music of the edible frog you will be well advised not to introduce edible frogs into any pond situated close to the house. Some of our guests, and they are pretty well inured to strange sights and sounds at Crossbows, have been known to lodge a complaint after some night of more than usually loud song from the little pond beneath the spare-room window. On one hot thundery night in particular, for heat and thunder both seem to drive frogs to ecstasies of love and song, a very loud and penetrating chorus was kept up till dawn. At the breakfast-table next morning the family felt somewhat embarrassed, but was relieved when the guest, an Irish composer, told them that although he had been kept awake most of the night he had not minded, since it was such a real treat to hear once again the call of a corncrake, a familiar sound of his boyhood and one which

brought back many early memories. We said nothing to disillusion him, or rob him of his pleasant recollections of the past.

Although I have made it clear that I make no sort of claim to being a gardener, there is one branch of horticulture—other than aquatic gardening—which I do go in for. It is a branch which has given me great pleasure and one which has many advantages over ordinary gardening. It is the cultivation of pips. Let us take an example. Suppose one day at table you eat a grape-fruit of unusual delicacy and fragrance. You keep a pip or two and place them in a small pot of earth in the hot-house. Before many weeks are past a green spike appears and quickly develops into a seedling and soon grows into a lovely little tree. This sort of gardening I like; no stooping, no weeding, no savage rabbits or slugs to shatter in one night all your hopes and pride.

Besides grape-fruit I have grown with success the pips of oranges, lemons, tangerines—the trees have long, sharp thorns—passion fruit, custard apples, li-chees—which grow into very beautiful bushes with long, pendulous leaves. One particular treasure is a sapling grown from the seed of a nameless tree which we discovered in Jamaica. Its parent was a huge tree of the jungle, and before long the hot-house roof will have to be elevated to keep pace with its offspring.

Each autumn I plant the pips of crab apples and crab pears, which, when old enough, are planted out in our fields and hedgerows. Nuts, too, are easily grown; filberts, walnuts, horse and Spanish chestnuts, almonds, acorns, and the American peccan nut. In the case of a particularly delicious peach, nectarine, apricot, or plum, I plant the stone, and the seeds of grapes are most rewarding to the pip-grower. The time will come when my grandchildren will play their innocent games in a place thickly studded with wild fruit and nut trees. They will be told how these trees

were planted years and years ago by their eccentric old grandfather, an often-repeated family legend which they will treat with complete indifference. No one, I believe, has discovered who was the Welsh philosopher who wrote: "There is a property in growing trees which gives the heart a joyful feeling."

The only thing against a lovely garden is that you hate to leave it, particularly on a fine summer morning. It is just such a one to-day, a blazing June morning, one of those summer days on which to do nothing, when all effort, physical or mental, should be avoided. It is a day for laziness, the only sounds to be heard are the two laziest in creation, the droning of bumble-bees and the crooning of turtle-doves. I am seated in an easy chair on the veranda porch or loggia, but am far from happy, for I have to leave Crossbows for the day to go to London about some tiresome piece of business. The day started badly, with a sick headache. On the breakfast table I found an unsympathetic and distinctly brusque communication from His Majesty's Inspector of Taxes. I don't feel very well; I suffer, in fact, with a family or hereditary disease, "a sense of impending disaster." And what do I gaze upon with a jaundiced eye? A herd of cows chewing the cud while they rest in a peaceful and contented group, in the deep blue shade of the great oak tree which stands in the middle of the meadow. How I envy those cows. They have not to go to London on business this lovely day, they have no sick headaches, no troubles or worries, except horse-flies or cleggs, and they receive no annoying letters, nor do they appreciate what is the meaning of "a sense of impending disaster," nor, for that matter, have they much sense of anything except hunger, which can be immediately appeased, or cleggs, which can be got rid of by the occasional flick of an ear or the whisk of a tail.

I never can make up my mind whether I hate cows or

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like them, or whether the cow is the most stupid of all animals or is one of the wisest. In theory I like cows. They give us milk, cream, and butter; they fit well into the rural scene.

The gentle cow, all red and white
I love with all my heart,
She gives us cream with all her might
To eat with apple tart.

Even the mooing of a cow, at some distance away and in moderation, is not without a certain attractiveness. But on the other side of the account there is the dull, bovine stupidity, the obtuse solemnity of cows. They are open neither to reason nor argument. They are clumsy. They plunge their great hooves into flowering plants, they break through hedges and thickets. A bull in a china shop. Although they appear to be so placid, so phlegmatic, like the English, actually they are subject, on occasion, to mob-panic worthy of the Latin races. One such occasion took place only a few days ago. We were awakened at grey dawn by a loud bellow just beneath the open bedroom windows. "Cows in the garden," we both cried as we leaped out of bed and rushed to the window to look. Yes, all too true, the worst had happened, for there, browsing in the kitchen garden below, was the whole herd, and the small iron gate was wide open, showing how they had got in. Without wasting time even to put on dressing-gowns, we flew downstairs. My wife went out to the front of the house to head the cattle from the flower garden, while I ran round to the back to drive them towards the open gate. As I approached them they were in the act of tearing down and eating the sweet-peas and pulling up the carrots and onions. I advanced very quietly and slowly, making endearing farmyard noises the while in order not to alarm them. At once every head was raised and turned in my

direction, with bunches of cabbages, sweet-peas, and branches of apple trees hanging from saliva-dripping mouths. For one instant the invaders gazed dully at the unique spectacle of a man dressed in brightly coloured pyjamas, then with a toss of heads and wild gleaming eyes, the whole mob turned and stampeded in terror, straight through everything, in the direction of the open gate. Through sweet-peas and scarlet-runners they charged, crashing through our apple and pear espaliers, tearing through the strawberry netting, trampling among the rows of onions and carrots, onward still, till they met the newly planted thuja hedge, which they ploughed straight through to reach the lawn. At this instant they first caught sight of my wife standing in her nightdress. To me she looked like some diaphanous fairy, but evidently the cows took her to be a ghost or else the Devil himself, for turning instantly away from her, they galloped straight towards the iron railing, which they all jumped as agilely as any steeple-chaser. Although the damage was already done and our carefully tended kitchen garden wrecked, we closed and latched the gate before returning forlornly to the house. We had not the heart or the courage at that early hour to ascertain what irrevocable havoc the cursed cows had committed. Then one of us happened to glance out of the window, and there was Gracie, the oldest cow of the herd and the leader, in the very act of trying to lift the latch of the gate with one of her horns.

As to the stupidity of cows, and indeed of all domestic animals, a word or two here may not be out of place. For countless generations, going back I dare not hazard—and could not even if I dared—to what dim era in history, the cow has been the property and the slave of man. It has been domesticated in order to give milk, to breed calves, and to supply meat, and yet, after centuries and centuries, this most stupid of animals, like the sheep, has never yet

suspected the reason why man is so kind to it or that its end will be in the slaughter-house. One would imagine that even the most obtuse brain would, by now, have begun to suspect a catch somewhere. But not the cow. No beast is more easily taken in or deceived than the cow. An example of this gullibility of cows reached me only the other day from Queensland, which is a State somewhere towards the north-east of Australia, much subject to prolonged droughts. There had been no rain for months and months and the whole land was parched and the grass burnt brown and dry. The situation for the farmers and cattle-raisers had become alarming. The cattle refused to eat the dry, brown grass, although actually it was almost as nourishing for fodder as fresh green grass. Then it was that one farmer, of an inventive turn of mind, had an ingenious idea. He made pairs of spectacles or goggles for his cattle, fitted with green-tinted glasses. No sooner were these placed over the eyes of the starving animals than they fell to eating with eagerness the dry grass they had before refused, because it now appeared to be green and fresh.

So much then for the stupidity of cows. But it is always dangerous to jump to conclusions, even in the case of cows. Perhaps after all the cow is not so great a fool as we imagine. Can it be possible that all this while it is the cow which is wise and man the fool? For all we know to the contrary the cow understands the situation well enough, and having considered and weighed the matter in her slow, unhurried brain from every angle, side, and point of view, she long ago decided which is the better life, the wild and free, or the tame and enslaved. Quite likely she knows that if she jumped the hedge, which she easily could do, but pretends she cannot, she would regain her freedom. And for what? To be harried by ravening beasts of prey, to be hunted by men and other predatory creatures, to have her calf torn

from her side, and often to suffer from hunger and thirst. Would she be wise to discard a life of comfort, safety, and serenity for one of constant fear of starvation or of sudden and usually painful death? I wonder if the wise and calculating cow did not, thousands of years ago, decide with her eyes open to choose the better and more comfortable life at a price. The price is the butcher's pole-axe, in return for which she is born into the world in the best hygienic surroundings, attended, if necessary, by a qualified man-midwife. She is housed in winter in a building which a paternal Government or a Board of Agriculture insists shall be both dry and draught-proof. She must not be cruelly treated; if she is, the same kind Government will arrest and punish her tormentor. She will never go hungry, for if in the winter the grass fails, she is supplied with sweet hay and succulent mangel-wurzels. She has no worries, no anxieties of any kind. If she should fall ill or be at all indisposed, a qualified cow-doctor will attend her, and prescribe suitable medicines, free. She pays no income tax, is not worried by money matters. Her family ties are short and sweet, for her offspring are taken from her directly they cease to be any longer in the delightful childish stage. She does no work, never becomes tired, does not go through life collecting all sorts of personal belongings, valuable or otherwise. She need have no misgivings about her future, no apprehension of the workhouse in her old age, nor fear of dying of a long and perhaps lingering illness. One day, as she knows, the call will come. She will face it bravely and calmly, for the end will be painless and instantaneous.

Perhaps, after all, the cow is not the fool we take her for.

CHAPTER XVII

At first sight you would probably associate him with horses. An ex-groom perhaps, or a hunt servant, or a man-of-all-work at a livery stables. Such a mistake would be excusable.

Picture a stocky little man of uncertain age, anything between fifty and seventy. Two piercing black eyes peeping from a clean-shaven, deeply lined, sallow face, a short body supported by a pair of thin bandy legs, and you see before you a pretty clear picture of Nobby, "our" keeper. He is not really ours, that is to say we do not pay him his wages. He is one of a number of gamekeepers employed by the local shooting syndicate, which rents the shooting at the Hall. We dub him "our" keeper because his beat is around our house and grounds, and so we often meet him and have gradually become friends. And friends we are, in spite of Nobby being both a murderer and an assassin.

There are town-dwellers and hikers of the C. E. M. Joad pattern who seem to consider that a gamekeeper has nothing else to do but drive away trespassers and feed hand-reared pheasants, until when the leaf is off the trees in November they are ripe to face the gun of the wealthy sportsman.

But a keeper is a very hard-worked man and in a way a learned specialist in his craft. Like a doctor, he keeps no regular hours, and like his brother of the stethoscope all his nights are not spent in his warm bed. But two advantages he enjoys over the doctor. He is spared the ever-present threat of the nerve-shattering telephone and his work is all done in the clean open air. In some ways his

life is spent, like that of the editor of an annual publication, in strenuous effort preparing for the great day. The game-keeper's comes in the autumn when the first big shoot takes place, and when he will be praised or blamed according to the number of pheasants killed, as his counterpart the editor will be judged by his circulation.

We all like Nobby, but would like him much better if he could be persuaded that it is not really necessary to kill every hawk, buzzard, wandering peregrine falcon, sparrowhawk, hobby, or little windhover, and that owls do not kill his pheasants, but do kill hundreds of rats, mice, and voles each year. All badgers and hedgehogs are sworn enemies to Nobby, who ruthlessly snares them with diabolical cunning in wicked toothed steel traps. Nothing is spared by Nobby, and I sincerely believe that if he had the least suspicion that harm was done to his pheasants by white-throats, robins, or tree creepers, he would set about exterminating them as he has exterminated most of the larger wild life of these woods. I confess to not being a sportsman, at least I have no lust to kill wholesale, but I do try to keep an open mind about shooting and hunting, and feel no doubt whatever that it is the shooting syndicates which are directly and indirectly guilty for the rapid disappearance of our birds of prey and of many other beautiful, and in many cases very useful, wild beasts and birds. Where a big shooting estate is managed by the owner, things are not so bad, the owner is as often as not a lover of wild life and is usually not afraid of his head keeper. But the management of a syndicate is too often left entirely in the hands of the keepers, and all that concerns its members is the number of pheasants the keeper can produce on Saturdays for them to shoot at. As long as there are plenty of pheasants on Saturdays they care not a brass farthing if every hawk, owl, or kestrel has been shot, trapped, or poisoned.

As soon as the last drive is over off go the guns back to

London, but the day's sport is not quite finished. It is continued on the following Sunday morning, during the time of church service. Then the keepers go forth with their dogs to collect the "cripples," as they are called, the birds wounded on Saturday and which in a private shoot would have been picked up at the end of the day, but in the case of most syndicates have to wait until the next day to be put out of their misery.

Though no sportsman myself, I do occasionally go forth on the warpath armed with a 16-bore gun. My prey is the humble rabbit, which I shoot sitting, if it is obliging enough to wait until I am within range. Then death comes quickly and without warning, an enviable end to the life of any wild animal. Sometimes I have a shot at one running, and if it goes rolling head over heels dead, I am conscious of a distinct feeling of pride and pleasure, evidence, I hope, of the instinct, even if atrophied, of true sportsmanship. But on the whole I do not enjoy shooting rabbits. If only they would be less prolific I would let them alone. A few pairs in each meadow would be quite enough, but our syndicate is too grand to bother about rabbits, and as Nobby kills all their natural enemies except foxes, rabbits swarm.

Now and again I give permission to the neighbouring cottagers to have a day's ferreting and the numbers are greatly reduced. But within a short while reinforcements have been called down from the Downs above, where food is more scarce, and the old burrows are once more fully tenanted. Occasionally I seize my gun in wrath, when the rabbits have discovered a weak spot in the wire-netting fence which surrounds the garden and have in the night wrought sad damage to carnations or young plants, or have dug holes in the newly sown flower-beds.

There was a time, years ago, when I enjoyed a shoot, but those happy days are gone for me through the injudicious use of field-glasses. I know I am laying myself open to a

charge of sloppy sentimentalism, but when one has watched animals at play through powerful field-glasses, one is apt to look upon them afterwards in quite another aspect than before, when they were simply fleeing beasts of prey or vermin. I used to hold the popular belief that all vermin, so called, had no right to live, and that it was man's duty to kill whenever the chance presented itself and by any means. Now I think quite differently. It all began during a stroll early one summer morning. I was wandering about in the New Forest not long after sunrise. I sat down in a hidden spot in the hope of seeing some rare bird. After I had been seated there a short while, a little movement on a sunny mossy bank not far away attracted my notice. On looking through my field-glasses, what did I see but a weasel lying on her side on the bank playing with several little weasels. The babies were romping round their mother and whenever one came within reach the mother weasel would give it a gentle pat with her paw. It was an enchanting sight, and I could have remained there watching those weasels for an hour, but at last I became cramped and had to make a slight movement, and in a flash the little family disappeared down a small hole in the bank. I never see a weasel now, hunting amongst the dry leaves in a ditch, or hanging dead and stiff on a keeper's gibbet, but that morning's scene comes back.

Rabbits playing together, old or young, are enchanting when seen through field-glasses, but too much of this makes the killing harder. The only natural ally we have to keep in check our rabbits are the foxes and an occasional stoat which has contrived to outwit Nobby's toothed gin. The fox is sacred even to Nobby, and numbers of them live in the hanging woods on the Downs above us.

Occasionally I add to our larder by bringing down a wood-pigeon, but such feats of marksmanship or rewards for patience are few and far between. In September vast flocks of these wily birds inhabit the oak woods. After

they have eaten up all the corn and beans left on the ground after the harvest, they begin on the elder-berries and then fall back on acorns and beech mast. Beneath an old oak tree beside a pond I have constructed a hide. When water is scarce I sit there and occasionally bag a thirsty pigeon which has come to drink. The crops of these pigeons are often so full of acorns or seeds it is a wonder how they can fly, or why they do not writhe on the ground in agonies of indigestion. The wood-pigeon is the enemy of the farmer. I know that because I have seen it stated so often in agricultural and sporting journals. Being of an inquiring mind I sometimes open the crops of my victims to ascertain what their last meal consisted of and have been surprised to find what enormous quantities of seeds of harmful weeds they consume. Once I took the pains to plant in a large tray of earth a handful of the seeds out of a wood-pigeon's crop. The following April a regular miniature jungle sprouted, and I was able to identify the following plants: cress, goosefoot, shepherd's purse, charlock, goosegrass, common dock, a nettle, buttercup, poppy, and a coarse grass. This seems to prove that however much damage to farmers wood-pigeons may be guilty of, they do some good as well as harm. There is a good deal to be said in favour of pigeon-shooting in the way I do it. One sits in a secluded spot beneath a spreading oak tree. There is a small pond with water-lilies on one side, and a thick copse of nut bushes behind. By keeping perfectly still and out of sight one sees all the pleasant things that are only for the silent and still observer; it is almost as good as angling with a rod and float. Now and again the spell is broken by a loud report, but in my case this happens but seldom. After settling down my first visitor is often a greater spotted woodpecker. His cheerful, rather cheeky "yap" is heard in the tree above. Until he moves it is difficult to spot him. More often than not it is the scarlet seat of his breeches which gives

him away. There he is, clasped to the underside of a big branch. He starts to call, and jerks his head from side to side. Little does he suspect he is being watched by me. Presently I tap my gun sharply with my finger-nail. The slight sound is not missed by the woodpecker, who immediately becomes alert and peers down to see what has made the suspicious sound.

The oak tree, under which I am seated while waiting for wood-pigeons, is a favourite house of call for birds of many kinds. The next visitor may be a handsome great tit. He hammers briskly here and there amongst the branches before passing on over my head to the nut copse. Fussy little family parties of restless long-tailed tits arrive, make a hurried meal, and are off again. But the first visitor of all is invariably a robin. I think he has appointed himself official warden of the oak tree. He soon catches sight of me where I sit and is very worried as to what he ought to do about it. He flits from one twig to another, trying to get a better view of me and to find out what the intruder is up to. He watches me with a dark, bold, inquisitive eye. But he does not stop long; no doubt his report goes down in his little notebook and he leaves me, to inspect the rest of his beat. A moorhen now comes out of the rushes and swims across the pond; her white tail jerks up and down as she paddles herself towards the water-lilies. She keeps pecking at something on the water-lily leaves; I think it must be some small water-snails. Occasionally a dilatory carrier pigeon—you can see the ring on his leg—comes to the tree before flying down to the stone wall to drink where the water trickles over the dam. The most handsome visitor I ever had was a male kestrel. He took his stand on a dead branch, low down, and not fifteen paces from where I sat. The sun was near the horizon and showed up his gorgeous blue-grey head, chestnut back, and yellow legs and feet. I sat rigidly still, watching and admiring. What a superb

bird of prey a full-fledged male kestrel is! At last, unable any longer to keep still, I made a slight movement, and in an instant the kestrel turned on me a lustrous and piercing eye, and a moment after spread his wings and glided across the meadow towards the oak wood. Only the next day I happened to pass through a corner of the same wood, where Nobby has his gibbet, and there hung the fresh carcass of his latest victim, a beautiful male kestrel.

It was one September afternoon as I sat "pigeon-shooting" that I had quite a different sort of visitor. To my horror and alarm, human voices became audible and grew gradually louder. Trespassers, thought I; whatever shall I do? This panic on my part was in large measure due to the happy reason that we scarcely ever get trespassers except a few flower-stealers when the wild lent lilies and the cowslips are in bloom. In theory I deal ruthlessly with trespassers. I picture myself angrily bearing down on the intruders and ordering them out of my sight in the Professor Joad style. But in most of my actual encounters with trespassers they have proved so apologetic and polite that my thunder has at once evaporated, even in the case of flower-robbers. Now this pond by the oak tree is a particular favourite of mine. It contains many curious foreign fish, which are given every encouragement to breed. It has water-lilies and other aquatic plants, and along the side of the pond, away from the wood, grow various semi-aquatic plants such as mare's-tail, mint, forget-me-not, purple loosestrife, codlins and cream, kingcups and reed mace. On cautiously peeping through the leaves I was horrified to observe a tall man accompanied by a lady. They were coming straight towards me, though quite unconscious of my presence. Should I flee? Should I shout at them to go away? While I still hesitated they arrived only a few yards off and stood looking at the water-lilies. It occurred to me it would be fun to fire off my gun to give them a

fright. While I was still uncertain what to do, they further outraged my feelings as a property owner by squeezing through the fence which surrounds the pond and making straight for the water's edge. Then, could I believe my eyes, they produced from somewhere about their persons gauze nets, which they proceeded to screw into the ends of their walking-sticks and a moment later both of them were hard at it dredging in *my* pond! This was indeed too much. Dramatically stepping forth into full view I demanded, in a loud, landlordish voice, to know what on earth they were doing. The tall man, the spokesman for his party, after his first astonishment at my sudden unexpected appearance, apologized for their intrusion, and they began humbly to withdraw, dismantling their nets as they went. But I called them back and asked what they had hoped to collect in their nets. The man answered that he and his companion had caught sight of the pond from the top of Chanctonbury, and had come down in the hope of procuring daphniæ, water-spiders, water-mites, caddis-worms, fresh-water shrimps and other specimens of the lower forms of pond life. The result of this confession was that the trespassers and I had an hour's interesting talk about aquatic life, flowers and birds, and that when at last we said good-bye they left, not only with many treasures in their specimen jars, but with a couple of monster tadpoles of the edible frog, which I went all the way back to the house to get for them. It is true I got no pigeons that afternoon, but instead made two very good friends. All of which goes to show that it does not always pay to abuse and drive away trespassers. The most glaring intruder may turn out to be a lifelong friend in disguise.

It must be obvious by now that I can lay no claim to being a shooting-man. To walk with a friend and shoot over well-trained dogs is to my mind an enjoyable pursuit, but I can find no pleasure in those extravagant organized slaugh-

ters which are now all the fashion. Walking with a dog and a gun, taking shots at rabbits, an occasional pheasant flushed from a hedgerow, or a partridge, or a snipe, is all very well and decent, but these modern battues seem to me both vulgar and greedy. Pheasant-shooting has become a highly organized business, and any game or sport which is over-organized loses its attraction.

In days gone by, on board a ship, it helped to pass the monotony of a voyage to play simple deck games, shuffle-board and the like. Nobody bothered or bullied you to play, but nowadays on most English ships and all "luxury liners" life for the passenger is made almost unbearable by organized games. Actually hired taskmasters are engaged by the shipping companies to see that no moment is spent by their clients in idleness. These people appear to labour under the same delusion as masters in private and public schools do, that their charges must be kept up to the mark every waking hour, and that if a ship's passenger or a schoolboy is allowed to be idle or alone for half an hour he is bound either to be bored or up to some mischief or other.

A cousin of mine, who travels about the world a lot and writes books about his adventures, generally sails in foreign ships. Not long ago he went to the West Indies, going there and back in a French liner. Somebody afterwards took him to task for not travelling in an English ship, and his answer was that he hated being made to play games when he did not want to, and that he liked on a voyage to make what friends he pleased, to be left alone, and to read books undisturbed. None of these harmless pleasures was possible, he had found, on English liners, so he had travelled on a French one, where the passengers were not interfered with, and, incidentally, the cooking and the wines were excellent.

Sport and games are all very well in moderation, but too

much organization kills both. No game, however trivial or innocuous, is safe from the organizer. Take for example the childish but perfectly blameless parlour game of ping-pong. The players tap a celluloid ball to and fro across a little net on a dining-room table. This game is now termed table tennis, and I am informed that there is an International Table Tennis Association, which governs the game and makes all kinds of rules and regulations, and that there is actually alive somewhere at this moment a world champion of what we used to call ping-pong. Amongst the rules which govern the sport of table tennis is the following: Number 17, I think it is. I was at a loss for a while to make out what it was all about, but after reading it through several times I am led to believe it is merely a roundabout way of saying that the player must not dent the ball with his thumb-nail. But I would value the opinion of others on this matter.

Distinction should be made between the measure of deformation physically inseparable from striking or pressing a resilient object and a deliberate deformation executed to alter the shape of the surface to secure improved grip. The latter may invariably be distinguished by a sharp click of celluloid, audible as the surface resumes convexity on leaving the hand.

Thus has organization killed a simple, homely pastime, although I am glad to hear it still survives in its original pristine simplicity in some of the remoter backwoods of Essex.

One result of all this meddlesome organization of sport is seen in the present-day mania for records. Everybody wants to go one, or several, better than anybody has gone before. Whether it is flying to Australia or going round a golf course or catching dabs from the pier at Deal, there is always a record to beat.

One day when stopping with some friends in Norfolk I

came across a dreadful book which was truly an eye-opener to the lengths some people will go to beat a record. The title of this book was "Record Bags and Shooting Records," and the author, Mr. Hugh S. Gladstone, deserves full credit for his candour and broadmindedness in opening his book with the following dictum of the late President Roosevelt: "Laying stress upon the mere quantity of game killed, and the publication of the record of slaughter, are sure signs of unhealthy decadence in sportsmanship." A few examples of the record bags contained in the fourth and latest edition of Mr. Gladstone's book may prove of interest to those sportsmen and others who have not kept themselves up to date with this subject. Let us start with the swallow. This record has stood unchallenged for a number of years, and without undue optimism we may hope it will never be beaten. The holder is the late Captain Horatio Ross, regiment unspecified, of Rossie Castle, North Britain. It was in the early summer that the captain bet a friend of his the sum of £100 that he would shoot twenty swallows with a pistol and single ball in one day. An immense number of swallows had built their nests round the towers of the castle. The shots were fairly long ones for a pistol, the towers being three stories high. The moment chosen by the captain for his exploit was while the birds were hovering with extended wings before entering their nests. Probably they were engaged in feeding their young. By the time the captain's breakfast was ready he had won his wager, and had set up a new shooting record for swallows.

But a far more sporting bird than the swallow—or were they not house-martins?—is the red grouse. For one thing the grouse does not hover over its nest and thereby give the sportsman opportunity to take steady aim. The world's record for killing grouse in one day was won by the Earl of Sefton and several other guns when on August 12,

1915, they slew 2,929 of these birds. The party was out again the following day, but had poor sport, for only 1,763 grouse were killed. Not discouraged, they went forth on the 14th, reinforced by Captain the Hon. R. Molyneux, but in spite of this Lord Sefton and his guests only accounted for a meagre 1,279 birds. The total for the three days' shooting was 5,971 grouse.

One of the most preposterous of all shooting records was that made by the late Lord Walsingham on his famous grouse moor in Yorkshire, bearing the uncouth name of Blubberhouses. This red-letter day in the annals of sport took place on August 30, 1888. It was a record in more senses than one, since this "unique performance" consisted of a one-man shoot, for his lordship shot alone, alone, that is, except for a small army of beaters. Several explanations were given for this most unusual and seemingly selfish performance. The one which met with most credence was that "a very noble and royal personage" had been invited to shoot at Blubberhouses, but after having graciously accepted, declined on being told by some friends that Lord Walsingham's was only a second-rate moor. So incensed was his lordship that he arranged this historic shoot in order to prove to his detractors that his was no such second-rate moor as apparently they imagined. Hostilities commenced at 5.12 a.m. precisely, and all alone his lordship continued the slaughter until 7.30 in the evening, using three guns and two loaders, and firing 1,550 cartridges. His bag at the end of this glorious day was 1,070 grouse, after shooting for fourteen hours and eighteen minutes by his head keeper's stop-watch. The hero of this sporting exploit, writing afterwards to a friend, said, "Had it been a good breeding season I am afraid to say how many might have fallen. . . . The one thing everybody says is, 'How tired you must have been—how your head and shoulder must have ached.' I fired all day and never had

the semblance of a headache or bruise of any kind, nor was I in the slightest degree tired. I played cards the whole evening afterwards as usual."

What the "very noble and royal personage" said when he heard the news is not recorded. May we hope that he learned a lesson, not to listen to the idle gossip of his friends?

Keen competition to beat a record and to wipe the eye of other sportsmen who have gone before still continues. On August 20, in the year of grace 1934, a letter appeared in *The Times* in which the writer stated that two days previously a party of eight guns had obtained the remarkable total of 1,348½ brace of grouse—2,697 birds. "It would be interesting," the writer observed, "if any of your readers have any record showing that this result of one day's shooting has been ever equalled or surpassed."

Let us inquire into the record bag of a less aristocratic quarry than the grouse, the plebeian rabbit. Perhaps you who read this, if you are fond of shooting, have had your good days after rabbits. You may have accounted for three, four, or even on some red-letter day five, score of these ubiquitous mammals. But what if you did? The Duke of Marlborough and four other sportsmen, on October 7, 1898, accounted for 6,943! But it must not be imagined that such doughty deeds can be done or such records made without determination and vigour. Shooting on this occasion began at ten minutes after nine in the morning and continued all day until twenty minutes to six in the afternoon, with only a break of thirty-five minutes for a hurried lunch. Even this glorious day's carnage did not satisfy their blood lust, for the sportsmen complained afterwards that if only daylight had lasted longer they would have killed enough rabbits to bring the total up to 7,000. Some people are hard to satisfy.

Another quarry even more humble than the rabbit has its record bag, although not many sportsmen would consider it worth powder and shot. But two gentlemen of Essex, brothers, on January 3, 1914—other momentous events happened in the year 1914—shot between them 727 house-sparrows.

How often I have wondered, and how often others must have wondered, what is the greatest number of starlings ever killed by one shot. The answer is to be found in "Record Bags"—504.

In these sporting records the peerage and the army seem to hold most of the places of honour for good marksmanship, so that it is particularly pleasing to find that the world championship curlew-killer is, or was, a member of one of the learned professions, a clerk in Holy Orders. This was none other than the late Rector of Kilkeel, who on Carlingford Lough gave the *coup de grâce* to sixty of these elusive waders with but one shot from his trusty fowling-piece.

It was as recently as 1890 that the practice of rearing wild ducks under domestic hens for sport was originated by the late Sir Richard Graham. This sporting baronet attained the climax of his success in 1902, when he killed 6,172 tame hand-reared mallard in six days' shooting. But the honour of making the British record for one day's slaughter of wild duck still belongs to the late Duke of Manchester and a party of eight guns, who at Kylemore, co. Galway, on November 9, 1910, accounted for 2,573 birds.

A favourite topic of discussion amongst bird-lovers and sportsmen is the mysterious and regrettable diminution in numbers of landrails. When they learn that as recently as 1919 a Mr. D. Davell of Devonshire killed 263 with his own gun, and that between the years 1909 and 1925 the same sportsman admits having shot 1,461, one explanation for the present scarcity of landrails is furnished.

One more example will suffice—more than suffice—to show to what lengths some men will go to create a record. This one does not concern the humble sparrow on the roof, nor yet the lowly rabbit, but the lordly pheasant, the rich man's favourite. On six consecutive shooting days in November, 1895, six sportsmen at Highclere in Hampshire massacred 10,807 of these semi-domestic birds. The record bag for one day was obtained in Buckinghamshire by seven guns, amongst whom were the highest in the land, when 3,937 pheasants were accounted for. The compiler of "Record Bags" very candidly confesses that he has been unable to corroborate the legend that in 1913 no fewer than 6,000 hand-reared pheasants were slaughtered in one day, so that without the required confirmation the Buckinghamshire record must stand.

One of the greatest of all experts with the shot-gun was the late Marquis of Ripon. During his lifetime he slew 556,813 head of game and died, as probably he would have wished to die, during a drive on one of his own grouse moors. One is tempted to go on quoting more and more of these records of sportsmanship, but the temptation must be firmly repressed. Those who hanker after more can get them out of "Record Bags." But just one more I cannot resist. It is a good example of the meticulous pains taken by Mr. Gladstone to make his work complete and shows how widely he cast his net into the by-waters of history. It concerns the oldest of all record bags, one which has stood unchallenged for more than three thousand years. It happened in the month of April, 1580 B.C.—during the close season—that the children of Israel, while wandering in the desert of Sinai, spent thirty-six intensive hours quail-hunting, and in that time captured upwards of nine million.

Even English pheasant shooters, Christian or Jew, cannot rival that, although it is the pheasant, a tame hand-

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reared pheasant, which is the favourite quarry of the modern shooting syndicate. The practice of rearing pheasants by hand to be afterwards shot came into fashion in the eighteenth century, and before long reached such lengths that in 1790 the poet laureate, Henry James Pye—the least-inspired laureate who ever ground out a loyal ode on a royal occasion—was inspired to write a satire on the degeneracy of the age.

The title of the poem is “Amusement,” and although it is far too long to reprint in full, a few extracts are worth giving for their own sake and for the lesson they teach. The poet is anxious that he shall not be considered to be narrow-minded on the subject of sport as practised in his day and begins in these words:

Far, far from me be that malignant train,
Who scowl severe on pleasure's silken reign;
Oft may her magic touch with sportive power
Cheer the dull langour of the tedious hour;

It is the wealthy sportsman who rears pheasants by hand with whom the poet is particularly angry:

Swol'n opulence is not content to stray
In anxious search thro' many a tedious day . . .

But the wing'd tribe, by care domestic bred,
Watch'd with attention, with attention fed,
Where'er the sportsman treads in clouds arise,
Prevent his wish, and sate his dazzled eyes:
And each redoubled shot with certain aim
Covers the ensanguin'd field with house-bred game . .

Transporting joy! to vulgar breasts unknown,
Save to the poulterer and cook alone;
Who search the crowded coop with equal skill,
As sure to find, almost as sure to kill.

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Listen also to what the laureate has to say about the degenerate hare-courser—or is it hare-shooter?

No more the courser with attentive eyes
'Mid the rank grass and tangled stubble pries,
Till, many an hour in watchful silence pass'd
A moment's frenzy pays his toil at last.
No cheerful beagle now, at early dawn,
Explores with tender nose the dewy lawn,
Avows the recent path with carol sweet,
And trails the listening leveret to her seat;
Stretch'd on the couch the lazy sportsmen lie,
Till Sol ascending gilds the southern sky,
And leave the hind, with mercenary care,
To seek the refuge of the lurking hare.

Even the fox-hunter, the pride of our English sportsmanship, does not escape the scathing lash of the poet's pen.

When even that generous race who justly claim
Toilsome pre-eminence of sylvan fame,
Who joy to lay with sanguine vengeance low
The sheepfold and the henyard's treacherous foe;
Even they who us'd, ere morn's first opening light,
To trace the skulking felon of the night,
With slackened vigour now their sports delay,
Till Phœbus pours the orient beams of day.

Although it is the blood-sports of the eighteenth century which principally alarm and anger the poet laureate, he has a word of warning to give over excess in other branches of sport as well. Even the game of billiards does not escape his notice:

As o'er the cloth, impell'd by gentler skill
The ivory orbs the net insidious fill.

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In the then new and fashionable craze for sea-bathing
Pye also detects danger and warns his female readers of

Those unnumbered shores where fashion laves
Her jaded limbs in ocean's briny waves . . .

Little did the poet suspect how unveiled those jaded
limbs were to become one hundred and fifty years later!

But there were other dangers than bathing lurking at
the sea-side, for

Britannia scarcely owns a town so small
As not to boast its periodic ball.

The poet was evidently much exercised in mind over the
all-too-common spectacle of the modern woman who took
part in the manly sport of the chase.

O may Britannia's nymphs those arts despise.
Content alone to conquer with their eyes!

Then there was the fast and wicked night-life which the
women of fashion were beginning to invade, and which was
to prove the thin end of the wedge to the night-club of
to-day:

And midnight revelry delights her soul
With breezes redolent of tea and roll,
In fragrant stream, while thro' the crowded room
The Arabian berry yields its rich perfume.

Henry James Pye was one of those who considered
woman's place in sport and public amusement to be that of
onlooker and applauder of the male, and he deplored the
modern craze of the fair to partake or compete with the
stronger sex.

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When opulence assum'd his golden reign,
With luxury and science in his train,
And beauty, man's fastidious empire o'er,
Join'd in the scenes she only judg'd before. . . .

Fifty years before Pye wrote his poem the great naturalist and bird-lover of Selborne made the following entry in his journal: "In the dry summers of 1740 and 1741, and some years after, partridges swarmed to such a degree that parties of unreasonable sportsmen killed twenty and sometimes thirty brace in a day." Good, wise Gilbert White chose the very word I have been searching for all this while, *unreasonable* sportsmen.

High amongst British field sports, perhaps highest of all, I place mushroom-hunting. I know there will be others who will consider fox-hunting, beagling, and otter harrying to be better sport. Alas for them, their favourite blood-sports are condemned both by public opinion and by the spread of chicken farmers, while no one but a few disgruntled farmers can raise objection to the sport of fungus-hunting. What, it may be asked, is there to be said in favour of mushroom-hunting over other field sports? First of all the sport is exciting, while the sense of sight is kept on the alert. It is not violent, but gives gentle walking exercise in the fresh air in open meadow-land. The keenest mushroom-hunter never sweated on even the hottest trail, though I am in doubt whether to use this vulgar word "sweat" after what I read the other day in a Victorian book on manners and deportment. In this little volume the reader was warned never to use the word "sweat" in conversation with or about ladies and gentlemen—and went on to explain that only horses sweated, while gentlemen perspired and ladies glowed.

Mushroom-hunting is a sociable sport. The members of the hunt do not quarrel when passing through a gate, nor do they kick up lumps of mud into the faces of those

following behind. The Master of a Mushroom Hunt—M.M.H.—is seldom choleric or petulant like an M.F.H., and only very rarely swears at his field. It is essentially a friendly sport, with no class distinctions, and with only a little training and instruction almost anybody but a blind man may become a proficient mushroom-hunter. A carper might argue that there is stooping to be done when actually gathering up the quarry. So there is, but a little gentle stooping does no harm, particularly in the case of the retired. And after all, Mr. Fox-hunter, somebody has to stoop to lift up the mangled carcass of the fox before it can be broken up.

But by far the most important point in favour of mushroom-hunting over its chief rival fox-hunting is that the quarry can be eaten, and eaten with enjoyment, and can be cooked in a dozen different ways. I suppose one *could* eat a fox, but I have yet to hear of a rider to hounds begging the master to give him the flayed corpse in order to take it home to have it cooked. Oscar Wilde could never have described mushroom-hunting as he did fox-hunting as “the pursuit of the uneatable by the unspeakable.” And there is such a variety for the fungus-hunter. Not only the common but succulent field mushroom, but in the late spring the delicious morel which is to be found in certain hidden glades in the beechwoods on the slopes of Chancetonbury.

In the autumn we hunt, besides the mushroom, the bright yellow chantarelle, which has the scent of apricots and which lurks in the woods. These three by no means complete the list of edible fungi to be found in England, but it is as well, before eating any unknown variety, first to consult the excellent bulletin, Number 23, published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, which is illustrated with life-like coloured plates.

Up to the present, mushroom-hunting has not been

organized. I hope it never will be. But you never know, a Masters of Mushroom Hounds Association may be in formation as I pen these very words.

Before passing on to other topics of country life a word or two will not be out of place about the artificial culture of the mushroom. According to an advertisement which reached us from a firm which deals in mushrooms, it is the easiest thing in the world to grow mushrooms. All you have to do is to buy some spawn, mix it with horse manure and a little earth, spread this about on the floor of your boxroom, attics, cellars, bicycle shed or stables, and wait for results. In due time you begin to gather your mushrooms, and keep sending them up in hampers to Covent Garden market for sale. We ourselves only wanted mushrooms for our own consumption, but all the same it was gratifying to be assured that our surplus stock would always find a ready market.

Apparently with little capital, less trouble, and no experience whatever the merest duffer can earn a steady income of five to fifteen pounds a week by growing mushrooms. The wonder is that more people do not seize this fine opportunity to make a good income with the minimum of capital and labour.

We decided we would take up mushroom culture conscientiously and thoroughly. We took expert advice and followed it meticulously. We took the temperature of the manure each night and morning, as though it were an invalid in a nursing home. We watered it, we added just the right amount of soil at the proper time. We cosseted our mushroom beds, shaded them from the bright sunshine, protected them at night from draught and cold. The result of all our trouble and expense will best be shown by a balance sheet giving the details of our out-of-pocket expenses and of the mushrooms we grew.

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Dr. Account

	£	s.	d.
Cost of two cartons of mushroom spawn	15	0	
One load best horse manure	1	6	0
Carting manure	8	6	
Total cost (excluding gardener's wages and overhead charges)	2	9	6

Cr. Account

Total number of mushrooms grown	1
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And this solitary and costly fungus grew by mistake from some spawn dust which had been thrown away on to a flower-bed.

Mushrooms are tricky things. We ate ours for breakfast fried with bacon, two mouthfuls, costing £1 4s. 9d. each.

Although ours is a good mushroom-hunting country it cannot claim to be a good one for fox-hunting. Up above on the Downs, if riders wander from the regular tracks, horse and man are in danger of falling into one of the gigantic rabbit burrows, while below the Downs there are extensive and almost impenetrable woods. But two or three times each season we are visited by the Horley and Crawsham foxhounds. This hunt is not one of your fashionable hunts; it is a suburban one which comes to Monkton for a jolly day in the country away from the tramlines and the by-pass roads.

We know each time they honour us with a visit exactly what will happen. After the meet at the Cross Roads, or the Big House, the hounds will be thrown—if that is the word—into Spithandle Rough, while the huntsman and field will ride up our drive and then gallop across our meadows. And then the same thing happens each time. A fox is found in the Rough and off he goes through Owls Croft straight for the steep, wooded side of Chancton-

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bury, with hounds and hunt in hot and loud pursuit. Up the steep hill he climbs until he reaches a dense thicket of box and gorse and small trees. Here he always manages to throw off his pursuers and now is the time for us to hurry out and cross the orchard, climb the steep bank where the pine trees grow, and wait. Loud hallooing and blowing of hunting-horns is going on up the side of Chanctonbury, minute horsemen can be made out silhouetted on the sky-line, galloping hither and thither. We bide our time in patience until one of us whispers, "There he is!"

Yes, there he is, a big red fox loping along towards us across the forty-acre field which separates our land from the foot of the hill. As he comes towards us, quite unhurried, he stops occasionally to glance back over his shoulder in the direction of the sound up on the hill above. We stand quite still, but make no attempt to hide. He knows well we are his friends. One day when hounds were baying, horns blowing, huntsmen hallooing, the fox passed close beside us, and, believe me or believe me not, when within a few paces of us, he turned his head in our direction and *winked*! The Horley and Crawsham hounds have never killed a Crossbow fox yet and never will. He who winks and runs away will live to wink another day.

All this talk of hunting and shooting brings to mind other matters appertaining to the autumn. This is the season when I keep a sharp eye on the correspondence columns of the newspapers. The letter from the country clergyman is due. Sure enough it comes at last, but a week later than usual.

It runs as follows:

A RARE STRAGGLER IN KENT

To the Editor of *The Times*.

DEAR SIR,

I beg the hospitality of your columns to report a very interesting ornithological event which has occurred here to-day. While

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seated at my desk in my library after breakfast I chanced to glance out of the window when I observed on my lawn a strange avian visitor which was, to me, an entire though far from unwelcome stranger. In size it was somewhat larger than our English song thrush but of similar shape and manner. Its back was of a warm chestnut brown becoming grey above the tail, its wings and tail of a dark brown tint. The breast was boldly streaked or spotted with black on a light ground.

Hurrying to look up this unknown bird in my copy of the Rev. F. O. Morris's "History of British Birds," 1st edition, 1857, I had little difficulty in identifying our feathered friend depicted in the excellent and life-like coloured plate as a specimen of the Nutcracker (*Corvus caryocatactes*). Since so few well authenticated records exist of the presence of this continental denizen of the forest in our little island, I feel it my duty to make this one known to the public at large.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

NATHANIEL STRANGEWAYS, M.A.

THE RECTORY,

MUDDLE ALLWAYS,

LITTLE BIRDINGDEN,

KENT,

October 9th.

Which reminds me that our fieldfares are late this year.

It is always more fun to see a rare bird than a common one. Many years ago I had an aunt, a very dear aunt, the wife of a famous painter. Their house in St. John's Wood stood in a large garden full of old ilex trees. It was before tall blocks of flats had been built in the neighbourhood and the garden was not overlooked. My aunt had a serious illness, and when she recovered she spent the summer days reclining on a couch in the garden. Her meals were served there and she used to scatter crumbs on the lawn for the birds, most of which were house-sparrows, with an occasional bold starling, while chaffinches, thrushes, black-birds, great and blue tits were not unknown.

Hitherto my aunt had not been interested in birds and was profoundly ignorant about them. After she had been feeding them for several days and more and more birds

came to eat the scraps she threw them, she asked a friend to buy her a bird book by which she might be able to identify the different species. The book her friend brought her was a rubbishy one, illustrated by plates, on each of which were depicted in bright crude colours some twenty or more birds, many of which were continental species very rarely seen in this country. After my aunt had the book a few days I paid her a visit and found her very excited with her new book open on her lap. "Guess," she said, "what bird I saw this morning?" I hazarded several possibilities and then gave it up and asked her to tell me. "A woodchat-shrike," she replied. I told her I thought she must be mistaken as only once or twice had that elusive bird of Southern Europe been known to visit England. She did not like my doubting her, and to prove conclusively that it was a woodchat-shrike she had seen pointed to its picture in the book.

What pleasure my aunt derived from that book and from her birds! During the next few weeks many other rare birds visited the garden in Grove End Road. No more woodchat-shrikes appeared, but an alpine ascensor did, while blackcap warblers were almost common, but unluckily never one was to be seen just when I was there. The hoopoe, too, I missed. The crossbill she could not vouch for with absolute certainty, for it had been climbing about in the top of an ilex tree and the sun got into her eyes.

Goldfinches, hawfinches, and bramblings abounded, while from time to time crested tits were observed, which had come all the way from the fir-tree forests of the valley of the Spey to St. John's Wood. A White's thrush, the giant of the thrush family, of which about a dozen had previously been reported in the British Islands, used to run about the lawn in the early mornings, seeking for earthworms, and was easily identified by reference to the book.

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All of which only goes to prove what things are to be seen by those who wish to see them.

Owing to her researches into ornithology, my aunt made one very interesting observation, one which had never been pointed out to me before, nor had I read of it in any bird book. She said to me one day, "Philip, have you ever noticed such a curious thing about the robin's legs—they have no calves"!

CHAPTER XVIII

VILLAGE cricket is the only sort worth while since the newspapers made test matches and county cricket sensational news. It is on the village greens of England that cricket is still played as it used to be played and as it was meant to be played. There is something very pleasant about a village cricket match. The players are out for half a day's recreation and rest. They are not worried about press notices or averages. Each team tries its hardest to win, but the loser does not take its defeat too much to heart, but hopes to do better next time. Village cricketers are the only cricketers left who play for the fun of the game. Our own team at Monkton was only formed this year, or rather was resuscitated after a long interval. I am the captain, and proud of it. My friends, who know my cricket capacities, wonder why I was chosen for so honourable and responsible a post. I wonder myself. We play against other villages and hamlets in the vicinity, such rivals as Washington, Dial Post, Thakeham, and Ashurst. And what contests they are!

All the members of the Monkton side, with one exception, are honest working men, reinforced during the holidays by a few keen players from the Steyning Grammar School. There is not one old school tie or a bright college blazer in the team. Many of us play in our braces, and are none the worse cricketers for that. There are certain strict rules of etiquette amongst us; for example, one player always addresses another as Mr. So-and-so, or by his Christian name, Bob, Bert, or George, never by his unadorned surname. The grounds we play on in this part of Sussex are very lovely. The actual pitch and turf would

not please a county cricketer, but then we have our lovely surroundings. We play in green fields shared more often than not with cows and horses, and we always have in view not far away the long line of the Downs. Many a ball have I missed when fielding because of the shadows and shifting lights on the rising hills. There is always so much to distract the attention. One day during a match at Dial Post, while I was acting as umpire a shout went up "How's that?" and I had in all fairness to give "Not out," as I happened at the moment the appeal was made to be gazing up at a pair of sandpipers which flew high above the batsman's head. I gathered that the batsman had reason to be grateful to those two waders.

We have our spectators, keen judges of the game, who either are very old men, with whiskers, or else little boys. You may see exactly the same onlookers at any village cricket match on any summer Saturday afternoon in England. Our prize spectator is to be found on the Ashurst ground, old Tom, the last of the Downland shepherds. He is the perfect type of "oldest inhabitant." Brown, weather-beaten face, clean-shaven but for a crescent of whisker which extends from one cheek to the other beneath his chin. On his white head is perched a small black bowler hat and on his feet he wears for the grand occasion an old pair of white cricket boots he bought at the last jumble sale at the vicarage. He has, but does not know it, a rival "old inhabitant," who is a constant "fan" at the Dial Post matches, but he is tall, crippled by rheumatism, and always wears an old peaked yachting cap and a sailor's jersey.

It is a Saturday afternoon in August. The match is being played much farther away from home than usual, against West Downs, near Woodingdean. We go there, beyond Brighton, in a hired motor-coach. It takes us a long while to find the ground. We pass it several times in our wanderings hither and thither, because none of us recog-

nizes it as a cricket ground. Your county cricketer would be shocked if he were asked to play on such a ground. The pitch itself runs along a ridge, a saddle, in the Downs, between two rising hummocks. On either side the down slopes steeply, which is of no little help to the batsman. As captain I choose always to field at point, with an agile lad at cover point to chase the balls which get past me. Fielding with my back to Woodingdean, I face as lovely a view as could be seen from any cricket ground in England. The batsman, a sunburned youth who wears a cigarette tucked over his ear, is ready for the first ball of the over. The wicket-keeper, in gauntlets and pads, who also wears a cigarette behind his ear, crouches a long way behind the wicket, not because our bowling is fast, but because on such a rough pitch a ball may come off the ground at any angle. I find it hard to concentrate on the play. Over there on the other side of the pitch the down falls out of sight to rise steeply into view again half a mile away, smooth and green, till it meets the pale blue sky. Not an object breaks the even surface but one tall hayrick, which casts a shadow which grows longer and longer as the game goes on and the sun sinks. A little way to the left, beyond the wicket-keeper, the ridge drops abruptly to reveal far below an expanse of sea, blue-grey like the sky, with here and there a cat's-paw of wind which ruffles its calm surface. "Over" is called; fortunately for me no ball has come my way. For the next over my back is turned to the clean down and sea, and what a change! In front and below is the vale of Woodingdean. Oh God, what is it makes man spoil what You have made beautiful? Once, not very long ago, Woodingdean must have been a lovely secluded valley of enchantment, gliding down from the high land to the sea-shore with nothing in it but a few scattered juniper bushes, a patch or two of gorse and an occasional wheatear, meadow pipit or skylark, and the breeze which never ceases to waft

up the valley from the English Channel even on the hottest of days.

And what have THEY done to Woodingdean now?

To-day it looks as if some giant bank-holiday-makers had picnicked there and left the whole hillside strewn with their litter. On closer inspection this litter turns out to be an accumulation of every kind of human residence, house, villa, bungalow, converted railway carriage, shed, and hovel. They are of all shapes, sizes, and colours. They seem to be scattered about anywhere and anyhow without any purpose or any sort of attempt at arrangement. What is the Brighton Corporation about to allow such a thing?

Is there no power on earth to stop such vandalism? If human habitations must be erected on the Downs why cannot a little forethought, a little planning, be employed to form a village or a settlement which need not be a vulgar eyesore? Apparently the ghastly example of Peacehaven has been of no avail.

Would it not have been possible to plan beforehand a village which was pleasant both to look at and to live in instead of allowing every vulgar little jerry-builder to erect any sort of monstrosity he liked and to plant it just wherever it occurred to him on the virgin downland? A limited number of well-built and designed small houses, as far as possible in keeping with the Downs, and with each other, might have been built on the north side of the valley where every house would have had an uninterrupted view of the Downs and of the sea. As Woodingdean is to-day, nobody with any love for decency, beauty, or quiet would garage his car there, still less live there. As I looked at it I wished I were a multi-millionaire so that I could buy up the whole of Woodingdean, land, buildings, tea-houses, hen-houses, the whole hodgepodge of rubbish, and after clearing up the mess restore and leave Woodingdean in its original state for all time. But enough of

Woodingdean; I just missed an easy catch through scowling at it.

The match otherwise was a success, as far as a jolly afternoon's game of cricket went, though Monkton did not cover itself with glory. All out for seventeen! West Downs, who understood their ground, knocked up a score of fifty-six for five wickets, when they sportingly closed their innings and put us in again. This time Monkton did better and by steady batting piled up a total of thirty-nine runs. This improvement on our part was partly due to regained confidence, partly to our having learned a useful tip from our opponents. This was to pull every ball to square leg, and lob it over the fence which stood about fifty yards away. This counted as a boundary and was worth four runs. Monkton no doubt would have put up a better fight if they could have brought a more representative team. Do not jump to the conclusion from this that we are bad losers. Some of our best players are farm labourers and cannot always leave their work for a whole afternoon and evening. Cows must be milked at certain times. The cows of Monkton parish have robbed the Monkton Cricket Club of many a victory. Jim Trewby, from Spithandle Farm, our hardest-hitting batsman, and Freddy Capps, from Bush Hovel, a red-headed wizard with the ball, are both cowmen, and seldom able to play for the village in "away" matches. I once made a proposal that we should take the cows with us when we went to other villages to play, so that Jim and Freddy could attend to their charges while our side was batting, but there appeared to be some technical difficulty which prevented this. Hay-making, too, has often stopped us from picking our best team.

Our most eventful match last season was against Sir John Squire's redoubtable "Invalids." When the match was first mooted I told Sir John, with perfect candour, what

poor cricketers we were and warned him that our club ground was probably the most rural in the whole of England. Its principal asset, perhaps its only one, is its glorious situation ; tall elms and spreading oaks around, with the Downs and Chanctonbury Ring above. This memorable match ended as expected in a victory for the visitors. No cricket team in England is more modest than Monkton, so imagine our mingled feelings of astonishment, pride, and bashfulness when the following report of the match appeared in the *West Sussex Gazette*.

SUSSEX CRICKET

The newly formed Monkton Club received last Saturday a visit from Sir John Squire's "Invalids." After an exciting and high-scoring game, the visitors won a few minutes before time by 45. At one point it looked as though the village would get the runs, and it is generally thought that they would have done had Mr. Christopher Stone been able to play, and had not the captain, Mr. Philip Gosse, been unable through illness to take his place at the wicket. Sir John Squire brought down so strong a team that Mr. Ralph Straus, although he had come with a brand new bat, was not considered entitled to a place, and was relegated to the scoring tent. The feature of the "Invalids' " innings, after Mr. Alec Waugh had taken the edge off the bowling, was a hard-hit 76 by Anthony Bushell, the well-known film player of "Disraeli," "Journey's End," and "Soldiers of the Queen." Runs came so fast that Sir John Squire was able to declare at tea; thus depriving the onlookers of the original spectacle of his own batsmanship. One or two difficult catches were dropped by the Monkton fieldsmen, but as a whole the standard of the fielding and bowling against a really strong batting side was high. Steyning will need to look to her laurels! Monkton had only an hour and a half in which to get the runs, and the "Invalids" were alarmed when, in spite of Sir John Squire's curious bowling, the total reached 71 before the fall of the third wicket. Good catches by Bushell and A. Kennington caused a collapse, however, and just as G. Hardy, the acting captain, was settling down to an innings that looked likely to win the match for Monkton, a final and singularly fine catch by Waugh ended his innings and Monkton's hopes. It is hoped to make this match an annual event.

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Kind Mr. Hope, of Monkton Manor Farm, lends us one of his fields, and his cows and horses are keen followers of the national game. When Monkton are batting they gather round to watch. Their behaviour would make a fine example to Australian cricket crowds, for they never "barrack" nor pass comments of any kind. They stand quite still and watch, never moving, except occasionally to swing a head or flick a tail to rid themselves of flies. When the last Monkton wicket falls the four-legged onlookers turn and slowly move away to resume their interminable meal elsewhere. When we are not fielding—and as a rule we seem to spend most of our time fielding—we sit and talk at the pavilion, which in our case is a big heavy iron-roller. The talk is sensible talk, not about wireless or cinema stars, or motor-cars or football or politics, but about things which interest us all. Such things as dew-ponds and how to make them; the fathers and grandfathers of some of us helped to make the three big dew-ponds on Chanctonbury, above where we sit. Highly technical is some of the talk about thatching and hedge-laying, and now and again the wood-reeve lets us into the secrets of forest lore. Allcraft, our first change bowler, likes to tell us about the colossal carp he and a friend catch in the river Adur. This little winding stream is reputed to be the first water in this island into which carp were introduced by the monks. He retells the exciting story of that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday afternoon when after capturing a carp weighing fourteen pounds in the clay pits he hooked and landed another, a monster weighing nineteen and a half pounds. We are not "doubting Thomases," we believe everything Allcraft tells us; his truthfulness is borne out by the fact that his two giants never vary one ounce in weight at each telling. Badgers, too, are a favourite topic at the pavilion gatherings; these men and boys all seem to have a warm affection for our one and only English bear.

GO TO THE COUNTRY

S.S.S.S.

The true narrative of this praiseworthy society, whose public-spirited aims were acclaimed by all and whose industry was meeting with well-merited reward, will be best recounted by reprinting here the official proceedings of the society up to the time of its untimely close at the hands of an unscrupulous firm of pettifogging attorneys.

Bulletin No. 1.

SOCIETY FOR THE SPREAD OF STICKLEBACKS IN SUSSEX

1932

OFFICERS:

<i>President</i>	.	.	.	.	E. G. BOULENGER
<i>Vice-President</i>	.	.	.	.	I. GOSSE
<i>Hon. Secretary</i>	.	.	.	.	H. MARDEN
<i>Clerk and Water Bailiff</i>	.	.	.	.	P. GOSSE
<i>Treasurer</i>	.	.	.	.	J. MARDEN
<i>Ass. Treasurer</i>	.	.	.	.	C. CRESWELL
<i>Publicity</i>	.	.	.	.	A. WAUGH
<i>Auditors</i>	.	.	.	.	RICE, WATERFIELD & Co.
<i>Bankers</i>	.	.	.	.	BARCLAYS, STEYNING
<i>Printers</i>	.	.	.	.	WEST'S PRESS, STEYNING

HEADQUARTERS:

Chanctonbury Cottage,
Crossbows,
Steyning, Sussex.

OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY

To bring to a close the shameful scandal of the shortage of Sticklebacks, alias Pinkeens, Spricklebags, Soldiers, Thornbacks, Banstickles, Sharplins, Rough-tailed Sticklebats, or Tiddlers—(*Gasterosteus aculeatus*); in the Adits, Ajutages, Aqueducts, Basins, Becks, Brooks, Burns, Canals, Cascades, Catadupes, Cataracts, Channels, Cisterns, Cloacæ, Creeks, Conduits, Culverts, Dams, Dew-ponds, Ditches,

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Drains, Ducts, Dykes, Estuaries, Firths, Floods, Floodgates, Flushes, Fountains, Friths, Gorges and Regurgitations, Gullies, Gully-holes, Gutters, Kennels, Lagoons, Lakes, Leats, Linns, Lochs, Locks, Loughs, Meres, Mill-ponds, Moats, Ponds, Pools, Races, Rapids, Reservoirs, Rills, Rivers, Rivulets, Runnels, Scuppers, Sewers, Shallows, Sikes, Sluices, Soughs, Springs, Stanks, Sticks, Streams, Sumps, Swashies, Tanks, Tarns, Torrents, Troughs, Water-courses, Water-falls and Waterworks, in the Western portion of the County of Sussex.

With this object in view the Society obtained in February last, five hundred Sticklebacks (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) from a fish farm at Shottermill. These were a gift to the Society from a public-spirited and generous member who insists that his name shall not be disclosed. (See next year's Honours List.)

These five hundred sticklebacks proved to be a poor lot, of inferior size and physique, the result of the selfish conduct of our own President who had previously picked out all the best and biggest "backs" for his aquarium at the Zoo.

In spite of this unpropitious start the Society has had a good breeding season. The original stock was introduced into the Society's ponds at Crossbows, where they increased rapidly.

H. MARDEN, *Hon. Secretary.*

P. GOSSE, *Clerk and Water Bailiff.*

July, 1932.

RULES

The colours shall be a green neck-tie, to be worn by all members attending any meet of the Society.

Each member will supply his or her own regulation net.

Pails will be supplied by the Society.

Every member must attend at least one meet in every year.

The Close season shall be from March 14th to June 16th.

Any member paying a subscription, or offering money to the Treasurer or Assistant Treasurer, automatically ceases to be a member of the Society.

All or any complaints shall be addressed to the President, who will, or will not, take suitable and necessary action.

In July of each year a formal inspection of the Society's waters will be made under the direction and leadership of the President, to be followed by a Feast.

All members are expected to attend, with their nets.

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Since June of this year the following waters have been stocked with fry bred in the Society's ponds at Crossbows: Giles's Spring, Parker's Ghyll, Home Field Pond, Philip's Folly, Swamp Pool, Abbott's Farm, Lower Chanctonbury Dew-pond, Quarry Dew-pond, and Storrington Great Pond.

Our Water Bailiff visits these ponds periodically and his reports are favourable.

P. H. MOSSGARDEN, *Secretary.*

September 1st, 1932.

On August 28th, 1932, a special emergency meeting was held at headquarters to discuss several matters of importance and to receive the annual report of the President and Publicity Agent.

The attendance would have been better if the Secretary had remembered to post the notices to the members.

In the avoidable absence of the President, the chair was taken by the Vice-President.

Several letters were then read to the meeting from members and others.

One was from the father of our Publicity member, who takes a very keen and intelligent interest in the work and prosperity of the Society. He wrote as follows:

"I must offer my sincere congratulations upon the successful launching of the Society for the Spread of Sticklebacks in Sussex—a venture which may well have results as beneficent and far-reaching as the conversion of the War Loan. Since the death of the illustrious Samuel Pickwick, the importance of the Stickleback as a promoter of rural amenity has been grievously overlooked; and there are large tracts of water in the crowded metropolis where he is practically unknown. The Metropolitan Water Board and the West Middlesex Waterworks have been particularly remiss in this regard. They enjoy exceptional opportunities, which they have almost entirely neglected. I hope that the operations of your Society may lead to a rapid and sustained increase in the fecundity of the *Gasterosteus aculeatus*, and that the aquatic bodies throughout the country may respond with eagerness to your public-spirited initiative. In all your activities in this field you may rely upon the sympathy and spiritual co-operation of

Yours always,

ARTURO PISCATORIUS."

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The reading of the above letter ended in loud and prolonged applause, and Mr. Arthur Waugh was at once elected an honorary life-member of the Society.

D. F. Leney, corresponding member for Surrey, wrote:

"I am much intrigued and honoured by inclusion as a corresponding member, but my professional side is cut to the quick by the slighting remarks on the inferior physique of my Sprinklebag stock. I would like to show our good will by donating a drove of Tiddlers to the Society's waters some time this winter."

A hearty vote of thanks was passed for this generous offer.

Henry Burroughes expressed his appreciation of the honour paid him and of the importance of the Society's work by writing:

"It was with a feeling of great relief that I read the account of the activities of the S.S.S.S., and it was with a feeling of pride that I found myself enrolled as a member. Such a society has long been an urgent necessity, and my heart has often bled when I thought of the anguish of the few Sticklebacks who must have realized that their race was in jeopardy in Sussex. Now I feel that I can sleep in peace, dreaming of the mother Sticklebacks straining their young to their bosoms and offering up a prayer of gratitude for the foundation of this noble Society."

The Secretary was instructed to write tactfully to Dr. Burroughes, and explain that *Gasterosteus aculeatus* not being a mammal, was unlikely to do as he hoped to dream, and that in any case it has prickles thereabouts.

The Chairman next read out the report of the President's annual tour of inspection. This was written on the notepaper of, and evidently in the time of, our sister society, the Zoological Society of London, and was accompanied by a covering note apologizing for the report not being in type as his secretary had just been bitten by a viper.

"GENTLEMEN,

On August 8th your President made an inspection of the Society's waters in the grounds of Crossbows, near Steyning, in the County of Sussex.

As clearly stated in our charter the ponds are exclusively for the use and upbringing of the Three-spined Stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*), and the presence of bathers is obviously not calculated to maintain the necessary balance of Nature. Yet your President found bathers of both sexes disporting themselves in one of the largest bodies of water to the detriment of the fish, the evolutions of the bathers displacing the muddy floor and thereby giving rise to low visibility.

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Proper inspection was in consequence impossible. The few Sticklebacks seen by your President appeared to be in fair condition, although inferior both in size and appearance to the specimens exhibited in the Zoological Society's aquarium in Regent's Park. On remonstrating in suitable terms your President was insulted, being invited to join in the violation of the Society's property.

I submit that the matter be given the attention of the general committee, to be summoned at an early date, when it will also be my unpleasant duty to comment unfavourably upon the conduct of our Water Bailiff. This official, retained for the proper supervision and protection of the Society's fish, was detected by me in an offence, the heinousness of which can scarcely be exaggerated.

I was a witness of the Bailiff quite deliberately depositing in one of the fairest waters the dejecta from a tobacco pipe of extraordinary senility, and of a quality abhorrent to your President's senses of sight and smell. So far from showing a proper appreciation of his offence, when brought to his notice, the alleged guardian of our fish confessed that this act was a common practice of his. I suggest that if this official be retained in his office after the meeting of the general committee he may possibly be brought to a proper sense of his responsibilities by being provided with a suitable uniform. In a certain class of person a high moral tone and pious devotion to duty is inseparable from a uniform. Could a non-commissioned officer display his qualities to the full attired in a battered hat, decayed breeches and ill-fitting gaiters? The design of a special uniform, to be paid for by the Bailiff, should be within the range of our many distinguished patrons and I submit that its early provision is to be urgently commended.

(Signed) E. G. BOULENGER,
President, S.S.S.S."

15.8.32.

After some rather heated discussion, the Water Bailiff was summoned into the council chamber and severely reprimanded, and warned, that if any further reports of a like nature were received he would be severely dealt with.

At the same time it was proposed that the Hon. Secretary's services should be dispensed with and a whole-time paid official appointed in her place. This was agreed to, and thereupon Mr. Phazel Moss-garden was installed as Secretary; the late honorary secretary being ordered to take over the duties of Clerk, thus leaving the Water Bailiff free to devote the whole of his time and energy to his important duties.

The next report read was from the Publicity Agent, whose handwriting is so extremely microscopic that even with the aid of a power-

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ful reading-glass the Chairman had great difficulty in deciphering it. As far as could be made out it ran as follows:

"September 1st, 1932.

To the Secretary, S.S.S.S.

SIR,

Regretfully, I have to report a rather unsatisfactory summer. My activities have been largely devoted to an attempt to interest the inhabitants of Villefranche in the society. The harbour at Villefranche is admirably suited for the culture of the sticklebat. The drains of the town flow into it and the open sea is a mile distant. Fauna flourish in profusion and every morning a number of small infants carrying the regulation green net, fish for "sardines de la rade"—an animal measuring at the most two inches. I suggested naturally that they should fertilize the harbour with sticklebat. They approved this scheme, on the ground that sticklebat would be good food for the "rade sardine" and would improve the taste of the local *bouillabaisse*. I explained that the society's objects were not, in that sense, utilitarian. They asked what then were the society's objects. I read out—in free translation—the constitution. They laughed. I am afraid that the French are too commercial to enter into the society in the true spirit.

Yours obediently,

A. R. WAUGH, *Publicity Agent*."

The meeting then considered a matter of extreme urgency, one threatening the Society's very existence.

A most unpleasant and indeed truculent letter had been received from a firm of solicitors at Stogumber. It ran as follows:

"JC/LAM.

UPGARDES & ATOM

—
Lewis A. Moggs, LL.B.

—
Solicitors.

BANK CHAMBERS,

STOGBUMBER,

SOMERSET,

September 10th, 1932.

The Honorary Secretary,

Society for Spread of Sticklebacks in Sussex,

Chanctonbury Cottage, Crossbows, Steyning.

DEAR SIR,

S.S.S.S.

It has recently come to the notice of our clients, the Stogumber Society for the Suppression of Starlings, that your society during the

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past two months has been habitually describing itself by the above initials and making use of them upon your circulars, letters, etc. Our clients, who, as you are well aware, have been prominently associated for close on half a century with all that is best in the life of the county, have from their earliest days described themselves and been known as the S.S.S.S., an abbreviation which has now for many years not only in Somerset but also throughout the whole South of England been universally applied to and understood as referring to our clients by all classes. Our clients inform us that great annoyance and inconvenience have been caused by your unwarranted use of the said initials and that many persons have been induced thereby to join your society in the belief that they were joining our clients'.

We must ask you, therefore, immediately to desist from describing or purporting to describe your society by the initials S.S.S.S., which have come to be wholly and solely identified in the mind of the public with our clients, and to give us your undertaking that your society will not so use the said initials in the future. Failing this we are instructed to commence proceedings against you for an injunction to restrain your society from further use of the said initials and for damages for passing off, infringement of copyright, breach of monopoly rights contrary to 21 Jac. I. c. 3, and offences against the Trade Marks Acts 1905-19.

Yours truly,
UPGARDES & ATOM."

"The matter was thoroughly discussed, and the general opinion appeared to be that as your Society possesses no funds, not even enough to take legal advice, and still less to employ counsel, your Society would have to bring to an abrupt close its useful, indeed national and patriotic work.

PHAZEL MOSSGARDEN,
Secretary, S.S.S.S."

CHAPTER XIX

AFTER reading through this book I am overwhelmed by its inadequacy, its shortcomings, and its omissions. It was intended to be a book about the subject of retirement, and how and when and where to spend that pleasant period of life.

But instead of sticking to his subject I find the author has wandered hither and thither into all sorts of by-paths of autobiography, has meandered up backwaters of reminiscence, and has aired various personal views on subjects which may be of no interest whatever to readers who are interested in the topic of retirement. All too late I see how incomplete a book it is. Just think of offering to the public a work which claims to be about country life with scarcely anything about a garden; not an antirrhinum, a phlox, or a lupin is as much as mentioned. Nor does that sacred animal the horse come into it, and no home of a real country gentleman should be without a horse. And gardens and horses are by no means the only serious omissions. In every other book about Sussex—and they are legion—the author lets his readers into the secret of his discoveries, with glowing accounts of delectable hamlets, undiscovered and unspoiled villages, and gives minute directions how to reach them. This has always seemed to me a cowardly thing to do; it is just as bad as kissing and telling. I, too, know lovely hamlets and villages in Sussex which are still unspoiled because to the general public they are still unknown. They lie in a wide but little frequented tract, not on the Downs, where you may walk all day, or drive for that matter, and scarcely ever meet a living soul except the inhabitants who belong there. The lanes are safe

for walkers, rarely is a motor-car to be met with, a farm wagon or a dogcart is more common than a car.

W. H. Hudson, in "Nature in Downland," published in 1900, makes this astounding observation concerning books written about this country: "Sussex," he states, "or any part of it, can hardly be said to exist in literature, or if it has any place there, and in our hearts, it is a mean one, far, far below that of most counties." If the naturalist meant to include in literature all the books written about Sussex, and if he was correct in doing so, then indeed the writers have been busy with their pens since 1900, for there are now far, far more books written about Sussex than about any other English county, not even excluding the county of Devon. There is an antiquarian bookseller at Hove who specializes in books about Sussex, and his shop is crammed full of them. A few are written by men of Sussex, but the great majority appear to be by men or women who have come from other parts of England to make their homes in Sussex. There seems to be something in the Sussex air which makes their hands itch to seize a pen and write about their adopted county, for although some of these authors were authors before they came to live here, many had previously led blameless lives as far as literature went and only caught the contagion after they arrived.

I have frequently boasted that neither wild publishers nor wilder editors would drag from me the name or whereabouts of a single unspoiled hamlet, village, or downland glade in Sussex. But someone, not a publisher or an editor, has begged me so prettily and so earnestly to describe at least one such secluded spot, that I have been unable to resist, and have promised her just for this once at least to relent and break my rule never to tell. To ease my conscience, my persuader assures me that it is the least a writer of a book about English country life can do, because the public who read books about the country expect, and have a right to

expect, such information. Apart from her persuasiveness, I feel that maybe she is right and that it would be selfish of me to keep all the good things to myself. So here goes for a retired hamlet, though I do most earnestly beg any reader of mine who may visit it to do nothing to break the spell which has enwrapped it for so many centuries.

Having decided then, after great and prolonged wrestling with my inner conscience, to do the thing, it shall be done handsomely; that is to say, I herewith will reveal the name of the village, or rather hamlet, and give exact directions for finding it, for it is well hidden from the ordinary hiker or motorist. I will also describe a few of its more interesting and curious attributes.

First of all, how to find it. Unless the directions which follow are faithfully and meticulously obeyed you will never find it at all. Let us suppose that the explorer travels by car to Pulborough, where he turns westward along the Petworth-Midhurst road. He follows this road until he arrives at the small village of Fittleworth, where he must turn sharply to the right, in the direction on the signpost to Bedham and Wisborough Green. Half a mile or so up this lane it divides, and he takes the right-hand one, marked Wisborough Green. The lane now begins to ascend a fairly steep hill, with thick woods on either side. After climbing this hill for about one mile the summit is reached, and on the right-hand side will be seen a gate. Leave your car now, for the rest of the journey must be done on foot, for the road here is nothing better than a cart track, which in winter or after wet weather is impassable for cars. Directly after passing through the gate the brown thatch roofs of an old farmhouse and a large barn will be seen. Just beyond these buildings lies the little forgotten hamlet of Withybed, in the middle of a wild, gorse-grown common, with oak woods on all sides. There is nothing modern to mutilate it, no petrol pumps, no dainty tea-shops, nothing what-

ever to spoil its spirit of mediævalism. The most prominent building is the church. The original edifice, long ago burnt down, was built of wood in 986 by a holy Sussex man, Saint Withy. Though dedicated to Saint Swithin, the saint who plays such pranks with the weather, the church was originally dedicated to its founder, but owing to the slurring dialect of the Sussex peasant, Saint Withy has become Saint Swithin. It is recorded that after the saint had built his church he led the life of a recluse in a cell near by, and supported himself by weaving punnets of osiers. This ancient craft is still carried on at Withybed, and there is a large grove of willows, just below the mill pool, where the osiers are cut to make into the punnets which the villagers sell to market gardeners for fruit baskets. The present church must be one of the smallest in the whole of England. It has a shingled spire on an early English tower. Inside it are old square box pews of oak, so seldom seen nowadays. There is an early English chancel and a miniature oak gallery, a clerestory, and flying buttresses. On either side are beautiful traced windows, and there is also a very interesting circular Saxon-tub font. Amongst the memorials on the walls is one to a former incumbent, the Reverend Aloysius Bossom, who enjoyed the probably unique experience of marrying seven sisters—consecutively, as the memorial is careful to explain. On parts of the walls the remains of what appear to be thirteenth-century paintings can be made out. Curfew is still rung each night from the single bell which hangs high up in the old spire.

Opposite the church is a fifteenth-century gabled house, with very ornate timbered front, and a Horsham-stone roof. This house must once have belonged to some well-to-do family, but is now converted into several farm-labourers' dwellings. A humble thatched cottage at the end of the single street should not be missed, for here was born and

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lived the Sussex ploughman poet John Enticnap, the author of the "Song of the Furrow."

It was at Withybed I saw a sight I had not seen since boyhood in Devon. Anywhere else it would have looked unreal, like an actor in a pageant, but here in this ancient hamlet it fitted in with the picture of bygone days so exactly as not to appear strange. It was an old farm labourer seated by his cottage door wearing a smock. At the other end of the street from the poet's birthplace is the inn, the "Green Man," where, besides good beer, good strong tea can be had, and thick bread and butter, home-baked and made, and home-made gooseberry jam. Standing opposite to the inn is the old mill, with its mill-race and pool. Leaning over the wall we could see numbers of speckled trout, and we were told by the genial miller that the fishing belonged to him, and that he was always pleased to give permission for a day's fishing to anybody who asked for it, but very few availed themselves of his offer.

There are said to be Roman remains close by, but this I cannot vouch for, though it is likely to be true, for on a stone lintel over a cottage door could be made out these letters cut in Roman capitals: Cl. Tr. Lut. Br. Ex. Arg.

There! now I have done it! May I never have it on my conscience that it was I who brought about the ruin of peaceful, lovely Withybed.

